**[Transcript](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. 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Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)**

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I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. 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So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[Hello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. 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So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:00:11 Glenn Baker](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. 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There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[My name is Glenn Baker and I'm an Employment Relations Officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:00:21 Glenn Baker](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[As we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. 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One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. 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[00:00:25 Glenn Baker](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. 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So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[The resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. 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It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:00:33 Glenn Baker](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. 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And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[Indeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:00:45 Glenn Baker](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[We're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:01:05 Glenn Baker](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. 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So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[minimise the costs I mentioned previously.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:01:08 Glenn Baker](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[OK, so over to you then, Mark.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:01:10 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[Glenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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[00:01:19 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[and there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:01:28 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[Or do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:01:33 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[So just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:01:55 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[So, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:02:12 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[I mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:02:16 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[conflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:02:34 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

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They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:02:55 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[that conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:03:05 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[I think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, that’s been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:03:28 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[HR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:03:38 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[And I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:03:45 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[Yeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:03:56 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

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Nicola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:04:18 Nicola Barber](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[I wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:04:34 Nicola Barber](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[means that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this conflict,](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:04:52 Nicola Barber](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

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One being that it should be principles led really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:05:14 Nicola Barber](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[So, all of the content coming out from CIPD, and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region, is all around](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:05:24 Nicola Barber](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[trying to dictate his principal led practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to us.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:05:31 Nicola Barber](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[This has a relevance to how the people professionals, ourselves, develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:05:39 Nicola Barber](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[And it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen,](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:05:53 Nicola Barber](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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[is unlikely to produce the best outcome.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:05:56 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[Yeah. Yeah, it's quite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Labour Relations agency and a lot of this is](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:06:01 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[that you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have I done that? And procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. 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I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:06:19 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[to be a move towards that notion of, you know, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of Richard's report as well. I mean it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:06:43 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[in terms of think Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. 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Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:06:52 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[you know the notion of stress; do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of working life?](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:07:04](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[Well, I think that I think](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:07:05 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[that the reality is for many people is that when we talk about sort of, we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:07:16 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[health and actually conflict at work. And I think](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:07:19 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[using that word sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody, falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee grievance.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:07:37 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a whole.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:07:47 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[That conflict at work has an impact on people’s stress on anxiety, depression. Nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety, or depression as a direct result. So, it's absolutely crucial. So,](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:08:07 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. 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[whether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:08:18 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[that problems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety, and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:08:27 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[back to just, picking up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:08:32 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[and I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years in a separate](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:08:43 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. 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Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[project and you know, talking to managers, nobody particularly likes managing conflict and as you mentioned, quite often they're just not given the skills, they're not trained, quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about,](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:09:06 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[organisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really supporting,](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:09:12 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:09:30 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[It gets through to, you know, the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is upwards towards something more like £50,000. So, there's a really high rate of return](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:09:47 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[on training your managers, supporting](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:09:49 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[them, giving them a bit of space to do that job well and to recognise the role that they play.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:09:54 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[Yeah, indeed. In sounds like £80 well spent and it leads us to Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:10:07 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[conflict and low-level dispute resolution as being an integral part of their job.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:10:12 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[Very often, although we see in organisations there are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them sometimes as conflict avoiders and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you, how do respond to that?](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:10:28 Nicola Barber](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[So, there has been a shift definitely to devolve](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:10:32 Nicola Barber](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[responsibility for people management activities to the line](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:10:36 Nicola Barber](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[over the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships,](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:10:48 Nicola Barber](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[all of the people activities that line managers are responsible for on top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:10:58 Nicola Barber](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[research as well is that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:11:07 Nicola Barber](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[And when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIPD ACE conference in Manchester just in Autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme came through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:11:25 Nicola Barber](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

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Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not, there's something fundamentally wrong.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:11:44 Nicola Barber](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[It hasn't been fixed.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:11:46 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[It seems to be a recurring theme, we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors in people, not the qualification or the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:12:06 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[And like you said, nothing new about, it seems to](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:12:09 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[be a recurring theme.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:12:11 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[And yeah, and one that I invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:12:31 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[organisations with just and learning cultures?](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:12:36 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[I think there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so, just take mediation first. So, I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:12:47 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[And I think that when it's,](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:12:50 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. 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Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. 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Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[when it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:13:09](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[have a significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort of](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:13:20 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[integrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong, and they might train maybe the odd person as a mediator](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:13:31 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[rather than looking](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:13:32 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[at how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you mentioned sort of restorative](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:13:43 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[just in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, Mersey Care over in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:14:02 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[I think it has huge potential, however,](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:14:08 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[I have a, there's a,](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:14:09 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[couple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:14:26 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. 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You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[And therefore, I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:14:31 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[You have to have people who have the capacity, the capability, and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And I think that](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:14:45 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[one of the issues connected with that is,](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:14:47 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[there is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:14:52 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[at sort of a theoretical level, so we developed, we talked, talked to them about the principles of some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:15:06 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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[try to develop you know their them as leaders of the organisation.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:15:12 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[But again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So, I think that if we're going to actually, if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:15:28 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[And I'm afraid you know,](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:15:30 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[as was just said, this thing comes up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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[00:15:38 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[And those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why,](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:15:58 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[we have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:16:04 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[Yeah, that is quite an interesting insight there. I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:16:10 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. 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Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[that gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and the theoretical aspect of it, and the real skill and sort of art form of low-level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you know](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:16:30 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[this is, it shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and a rise in this.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:16:50 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[Nicola, can I come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:17:01 Nicola Barber](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[There's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:17:08 Nicola Barber](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[identified that as a need for the branch to deliver that to our members and we're running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So, we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:17:28 Nicola Barber](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[But there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:17:35 Nicola Barber](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. 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Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[And just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but then you look at the employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:17:54 Nicola Barber](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[And when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict quickly?](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:18:00 Nicola Barber](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[The result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think oh yeah, we're really good at that. So, there is a definite perception on that.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:18:13 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[Go ahead Richard.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:18:15 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[Just to back up what's just been said there I mean I think it's a](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:18:20 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[really important point.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:18:23 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[We’re doing a lot of work with line managers, me, and some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:18:28 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, some tools to deal with some of these issues. So, there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nicola was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:18:51 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[those, the core,](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:18:53 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. 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Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[you know, for example what, Mark, you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:19:15 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[quite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work, and they're faced with people who don't want to talk](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:19:25 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[to them or](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:19:26 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[won't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:19:30 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[those are the times we manage to say to us we need; we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:19:36 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[And I think that you know using those types of mediative skills is a](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:19:43 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[is a really important way forward.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:19:44 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[Yeah, I think I think it's a point well-made and Nicola said about that perception gap. There definitely is, yeah, that the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:19:57 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[Boom that's done at the yearend without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical, or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:20:13 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[organisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't seem to work.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:20:18 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[And that we,](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:20:19 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[we would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and that box was ticked. There's a lot more to it, absolutely.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:20:29 Nicola Barber](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. 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You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:20:34 Nicola Barber](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[In organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is conflict.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:20:43 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in all of this.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:20:52 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impressionist painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say oh right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on employment relations type issue,](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. 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Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:21:12 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[then, operationally you're going to be failing as well. You know, there's no, there's a clear causal link](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:21:18 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[between the two, Richard, any other observations on that?](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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[00:21:22 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[Well, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic colleagues and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:21:38 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[take these issues more seriously.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:21:42 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[And I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the things, one of the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:21:56 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

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And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:22:16 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[better employment relationships. They produce better solutions if you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that, the difficulty of the language](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:22:30 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[there, is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:22:50 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[And therefore, I think I think there's](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:22:52 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[a real overlap really in the in the value and impact some of the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:23:01 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[Absolutely. Well, some fascinating insights there from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:23:13 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[productivity and the employment relationship and the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to industrial tribunal,](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. 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Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:23:20 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola Barber CIPD Chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:23:36 Nicola Barber](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[Thank you.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:23:40 Richard Saundry](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[Thanks very much.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. 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I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. 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Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. 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Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:23:42 Mark McAllister](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. 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Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[Lovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. 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And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. I think one of the thing, but I think one of the the, the, the, the the key things is to try to strip back what we actually need and what we actually are trying to achieve here.00:21:56 Richard SaundryAnd and it is about it is about people being able to have good conversations in the workplace to being able to to listen to, to ask good questions, to work collaboratively. And those skills are not just relevant to conflict situations, they actually produce.00:22:16 Richard SaundryBetter employment relationships. They produce better solutions. If you're working technically, they are transferable across a whole range of different areas of work, and I think one way of perhaps getting over that that the difficulty of the language.00:22:30 Richard SaundryThere is trying to make the case that a lot of the skills that that managers and HR practitioners need to resolve conflict are also skills that they need to negotiate good deals. There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[00:23:50 Glenn Baker](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. 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But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)

[Just like to thank Mark, Nicola, and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to our others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you very much. Goodbye.](http://The Cost of Workplace Conflict Podcast 5.mp3Transcript00:00:05 Glenn BakerHello and welcome to the fifth podcast on our series aiming to explore the world of work and challenge workplace cultures.00:00:11 Glenn BakerMy name is Glenn Baker and I'm an employment relations officer with the Labour Relations Agency, and I'll be introducing today's episode.00:00:21 Glenn BakerAs we all know, sometimes relationships in the workplace can and do breakdown.00:00:25 Glenn BakerThe resulting conflict will often have a negative impact on the individuals involved, but it also affects the performance of the organisations that they work for.00:00:33 Glenn BakerIndeed, recent research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency has estimated the cost of workplace conflict to employers in Northern Ireland to be a staggering £851 million per year.00:00:45 Glenn BakerWe're joined now by the co-author of this research, Professor Richard Saundry, from the University of Westminster, Nicola Barber, Branch chair of the CIPD in Northern Ireland, and our own Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Services here at the LRA, who will discuss how the effective management of workplace conflict can help maintain employment relations and therefore,00:01:05 Glenn Bakerminimise the costs I mentioned previously.00:01:08 Glenn BakerOK, so over to you then, Mark.00:01:10 Mark McAllisterGlenn, thanks very much and very welcome to Richard and Nicola, delighted to have you here at the Labour Relations Agency. So, Richard, we're looking at the report,00:01:19 Mark McAllisterand there are some really scary figures attached to the report. And do you think that the cost metric will always be the sort of headline grabber?00:01:28 Mark McAllisterOr do you think cultural changes to workplace conflict will overtake it?00:01:33 Richard SaundrySo just to begin with, you said these figures are fairly scary mark and that that's true to a certain extent, I would just point out when we were doing this work, we deliberately tried to be really conservative in the estimates that we came up with. So, at every point we're sort of making sure that we're not double counting, we're not exaggerating anything.00:01:55 Richard SaundrySo, I would argue that probably, although those things are fairly significant that if anything in reality that perhaps a little bit higher than those that are in the research itself and just moving on to your main question.00:02:12 Richard SaundryI mean, I've been doing this for quite a while now. I mean, I've been researching workplace00:02:16 Richard Saundryconflict for probably about 20 years and one of the things that I really notice is that when we talk to managers on the ground, when we talk to staff, when we talk to Union representatives, when we talk to HR practitioners who deal with this on a day-to-day basis,00:02:34 Richard Saundrythey are really aware of the cost of conflict, both the financial costs and the personal costs of those people involved, the difficulty is, is that when I go and talk to organisational leaders, then there's quite often a bit of a tumbleweed moment. They're really reluctant to engage with the reality,00:02:55 Richard Saundrythat conflict is just a part of everyday working life, and that all organisations will experience workplace conflicts and a lot of leaders don't like to admit that. And, therefore,00:03:05 Richard SaundryI think that's where this type of research, which is the first that's of this type, has been done in the UK. This type of research, which actually puts some very clear figures on the cost of conflict, is really important, just so that just so that the organisations really start to sit up and take notice, I think it's also really important for00:03:28 Richard SaundryHR practitioners, because quite often they're trying to persuade their leaders to invest in things like training or trying to improve culture in the organisation.00:03:38 Richard SaundryAnd I think that having, being armed with those statistics and that hard evidence that this has an impact on the bottom line is really important.00:03:45 Mark McAllisterYeah, that's really interesting because you always find that there is this flip flop between the quantitative research and the qualitative research, and this is a really good piece of research that sort of combines the00:03:56 Mark McAllistertwo despite the scary figures. That's great. Thanks very much indeed for that, Richard. Nichola, I move on to you and from, you know, from the HR practitioner’s perspective, do you think the whole notion of procedural correctness in resolving workplace conflict is prioritised by practitioners in Northern Ireland over all other considerations?00:04:18 Nicola BarberI wouldn't say over all other considerations there’s a number of variants to it. The CIPD did carry out research in this area in 2020 and what they found was that yes, there is continued reliance on formal processes and procedures to deal with conflict and that really00:04:34 Nicola Barbermeans that we need to be guided by policy and process and not bound by them. So, for the last few years, CIPD have really been trying to shift that focus through the CIPD professional map, for instance, which sets the context for people professionals to move away from a risk adverse approach, particularly around this.00:04:52 Nicola BarberCorrect and and to move away from an over reliance on policies and procedures to one that's more people focused and promotes ethical practise and then that really ties into the key value for the profession as well. One being that it should be principles LED really seeing beyond the rules and to do what's right and using principles to inform our decision making.00:05:14 Nicola BarberSo all of the content coming out from CIPD and you will see especially around our website and any content that we would deliver as a branch or as the region is all around.00:05:24 Nicola BarberTrying to dictate his principal LED practise, particularly in Northern Ireland, because it's relevant to.00:05:31 Nicola BarberSo this is the relevance to how the people professionals ourselves develop effective approaches to resolve conflict and work.00:05:39 Nicola BarberAnd it really means understanding that situations and decisions involving people aren't always clear cut. I mean, there's always grey areas that we have to work in and sticking to a, a, a procedure rigidly which sometimes can happen.00:05:53 Nicola BarberIs unlikely to produce the best outcome.00:05:56 Mark McAllisterYeah. Yeah, it's.00:05:57 Mark McAllisterQuite it's quite interesting. I mean, our experience in the Liberal Relations agency and a lot of this is.00:06:01 Mark McAllisterThat you know, a lot of this is driven by the statutory procedures which still exist in Northern Ireland that don't exist in in GB, and there is a degree of almost comfort that line managers take in this sort of tick box approach. Have I done this? Have it, and procedural correctness seems to be at the heart of that. And you're right, there needs.00:06:19 Mark McAllisterTo be a move towards.00:06:21 Mark McAllisterThat notion of, you know, there's, there's, there's going to be grey areas there are, you know, opportunities that shouldn't be missed for informal dispute resolution. And that's really about the skills and the managerial capability which is at the centre core of of of of Richard's report as well. I mean it's it's it's quite interesting to see that sort of almost defensive mindset that has developed over the years.00:06:43 Mark McAllisterIn terms of.00:06:44 Mark McAllisterThink Industrial Tribunal first and work your way back, you know, and and it's stressful. They're stressful. Richard, if I could, if I could move to you and and and and.00:06:52 Mark McAllisterAnd you know the notion of stress, do you think that workers consider the stresses associated with workplace conflict as a as an occupational hazard and just part of this sort of day-to-day stress of of work and life?00:07:04Well, I think that I think.00:07:05 Richard SaundryThat the reality is.00:07:06 Richard SaundryFor for many people is that when we talk about sort of we we talk a lot these days about health and well-being in, in the workplace, we talk a lot about mental.00:07:16 Richard SaundryYou know, and actually conflict at work and and I.00:07:19 Richard SaundryThink using that.00:07:20 Richard SaundryWord sometimes is problematic. You know when I talk about conflict, I really mean, you know, being unhappy with somebody falling out with somebody at work, having a disagreement, somebody speaking in a in a in an unpleasant way to somebody, that's not necessarily a disciplinary issue or an employee.00:07:37 Richard SaundryGrievance. But that conflict at work, which we found affects more than 1/3 of workers in Northern Ireland, very similar proportions across the UK as a.00:07:47 Richard SaundryOhh, and that conflict at work has an impact on peoples stress on anxiety, depression. Six out nearly 6 out of 10 workers who are involved in the conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result. So it's absolutely crucial. So.00:08:07 Richard SaundryWhether they whether they connect it with conflict or whether they see it in in such stark terms is I'm not so sure, but certainly there is no doubt whatsoever.00:08:18The.00:08:18 Richard SaundryProblems at work play a significant role in creating stress, anxiety and depression for a lot of employees, and I think going.00:08:27 Richard SaundryBack to just.00:08:28 Richard SaundryPick up on your point about managers as well. Mark if I can.00:08:32 Richard SaundryAnd I think we also underestimate that managing conflict is also very difficult. We've just been doing a lot of research with line managers over the past couple of years and a separate.00:08:43 Richard SaundrySubject And you know, talking to managers load particularly likes managing conflict and and as you mentioned quite often they're just not given the skills. They're not trained quite often they're not given the space to have high quality conversations with people. They're put in a very, very difficult position. And I think if we want to move away from the procedurally based approaches as we've been talking about.00:09:06 Richard SaundryOrganisations have just got to start taking this issue seriously and really support.00:09:12 Richard SaundryThing and giving managers the tools they need to be able to nip issues in the bud and have those and you know, address issues at an early stage. I mean, our research shows costs about £80 for a manager to have a conversation with a member of their staff and maybe nip that issue in the bud.00:09:30 Richard SaundryIt gets through to, you know, the the cost of that issue escalates. Maybe the person leaves and even takes an employment tribunal claim. You know, the cost of that is that would would towards something more like 50,000 lbs. So there's a really high rate of return.00:09:47 Richard SaundryOn training your managers supporting.00:09:49 Richard SaundryThem giving them a bit of space to do.00:09:51 Richard SaundryThat job well and to recognise the.00:09:53 Richard SaundryRole that they.00:09:54 Mark McAllisterPlay. Yeah, indeed. In terms like £80, well spent and it leads us in Nicola. Then to talk about, you know, this whole notion of managers becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable and seeing managing.00:09:58Wavelength.00:10:07 Mark McAllisterConflict and and low level dispute resolution has been an integral part of their.00:10:12 Mark McAllisterClub very often, although we see in organisations that are operational staff who are promoted up through the ranks into management roles and you know, do you see them? Uh, sometimes as conflict avoiders and and they don't see the management of conflict as being part of their role. How would you how do?00:10:28 Nicola BarberYou respond to that. So there has been a shift definitely to devolve.00:10:32 Nicola BarberResponsibility for people management activities to the line.00:10:36 Nicola BarberOver the last number of years and managing people can be difficult and it takes up a great lot of time and then having that pressure of managing people, managing all those relationships.00:10:48 Nicola BarberAll of the people activities that align managers responsible for and top of their operational responsibilities is a big, big ask and quite often, as Richard has mentioned and pointed out in his.00:10:58 Nicola BarberResearch as well.00:10:59 Nicola BarberIs that there's not enough training and support for our managers and that's something that we're getting fundamentally wrong as a people profession.00:11:07 Nicola BarberAnd when I call upon my experience that I attended the CIP DS conference in Manchester just in autumn last year and every session that I attended, this theme comes through about accidental managers being really good technical roles have been promoted, but they're just not good at the people space.00:11:25 Nicola BarberI've heard this for like 20 years that I've worked in your chart and I can might baffle thinking we are doing something fundamentally wrong. Every conference I go to, every event, any HR professional you speak to, they talk about these accidental managers and we're just not. There's something fundamentally wrong.00:11:44 Nicola BarberIt hasn't been fixed.00:11:46 Mark McAllisterIt seems to be a recurring thing we would hear about it in the Labour Relations Agency quite a bit in in terms of accidental managers and you know, we talk about investors and people not not the the qualification or the OR the badge, but the actual lack of investment in middle managers and supervisors in employment in core employment relations skills.00:12:06 Mark McAllisterAnd like you said it it it nothing new about it seems to.00:12:09 Mark McAllisterBe a a recurring theme.00:12:11 Mark McAllisterAnd yeah, and one the one that I'm invariably will come back to in, in future podcasts, Richard, if I move back to you and and we talk about the sort of cultures that exist in organisations with with regard to dispute prevention and dispute resolution, what are your feelings about concepts such as transformative workplace mediation and restorative?00:12:31 Mark McAllisterOrganisations without with just on learning cultures.00:12:36 Richard SaundryI think there's a there's at least a couple of podcasts just in those two things. I mean, I think so. Just take mediation first. So I mean, we've done quite a bit of work in terms of what mediation can do.00:12:47 Richard SaundryAnd I think.00:12:48 Richard SaundryThat when it's.00:12:50 Richard SaundryWhen it's implemented in a strategic way, when it's connected up with other sort of people, management practise and processes, when you use mediators to train your managers, as we've just been mentioning, when you sort of try to actually use those mediation skills and embed them within the organisation, I think it can.00:13:09Have.00:13:10 Richard SaundryA significant impact and even a transformative effect on some organisations to do that, though, it needs a very strategic and sort.00:13:19 Richard SaundryOf.00:13:20 Richard SaundryIntegrated approach and I think too many organisations just use mediation as a sort of bit of a bolt on when things go wrong and they might trade. Maybe the odd person as a mediator.00:13:31 Richard SaundryRather than looking.00:13:32 Richard SaundryAt how it can strategically sort of shape the way that conflict is managed, I think when you you mentioned sort of restorative.00:13:43 Richard SaundryJust in learning cultures, and I think that's really fascinating. And I mean the work that people like, for example, mercy care over in in England have been doing and other particularly in the NHS, other organisations have been following their lead. I mean, I think it's really exciting work.00:14:02 Richard SaundryI think it has huge potential, however.00:14:08 Richard SaundryI have.00:14:08 Richard SaundryA there's a.00:14:09 Richard SaundryCouple of sort of notes of caution. One goes back to what we've been saying is that you can have all the innovative sort of strategic approaches that you want unless you have managers who are capable and have the time to have a conversation, difficult conversation with their staff. It ain't going to work.00:14:26 Richard SaundryAnd therefore I think that, you know, that is absolutely crucial.00:14:31 Richard SaundryYou have to.00:14:31 Richard SaundryHave people who have the capacity, the capability and the time to put these things into place. You're not going to achieve cultural change unless you get those building blocks in place. And and I think that.00:14:45 Richard SaundryOne of the issues connected with that is.00:14:47 Richard SaundryThere is a bit of a danger sometimes that we train our managers.00:14:52 Richard SaundryAt sort of a theoretical level, so we we we we developed, we talked, talked them about the principles of some of these some of these things are quite a high level which is very interesting, which they and they enjoyed listening to those things or we might.00:15:06 Richard SaundryTry to develop.00:15:07 Richard SaundryYou know their their them as leaders of the organisation.00:15:12 Richard SaundryBut again, unless you have the basic building blocks of people skills first, then that's just going to go out the window. So I think that if we're going to actually if if some of these more sophisticated, innovative approaches are really going to shift culture.00:15:28 Richard SaundryAnd I'm afraid you know.00:15:30 Richard SaundryAs was just said, this thing comes up and up and up time and time again. If we're going to change culture, you need to get the basics in place first.00:15:38 Richard SaundryAnd those basics are making sure that that those people who are involved in conflict handling, who are on the front line when issues emerge, that they've got some of the basic tools they need to do the job. And I think to a certain extent that's what we've missed out in the UK and that's why.00:15:58 Richard SaundryWe have been talking about it for 20 years because we've been developing managing the wrong things as far as I'm concerned.00:16:04 Mark McAllisterYeah, that that is quite an interesting insight there. I think I I think we could all it resonates with everybody around the room here when we're talking about that sort of.00:16:10 Mark McAllisterThat gap between strategy and capacity building, and that gap between the paper and the practise and and the theoretical aspect of it, and and and the real skill and and and sort of art form of low level dispute resolution which does take people out of their comfort zone, especially supervisors and managers who have come from an operational background who now feel that you.00:16:30 Mark McAllisterThis is it. It shouldn't be a bolt on. It is part of cultural change, as Richard says. And that does take it takes a a great deal of investment. It takes a great deal of time, any cultural change in any organisation will take will take that amount of time. It's interesting that we talk about strategy and future trends and and and and and Arizona cannon.00:16:50 Mark McAllisterNever come back to you in terms of, you know, in terms of trends, what, what what trends amongst HR professionals in Northern Ireland are you seeing regarding the approach to workplace conflict?00:17:01 Nicola BarberThere's definitely an interest in mediation for our members in Northern Ireland and we have.00:17:08 Nicola BarberWe have identified that as a as a need for the branch to deliver that to our Members and we've running an event this year actually on mediation skills and that's going to be using mediation skills in HR to resolve workplace conflict. So we're hoping that that will start a process, a new skill set, a new level of understanding.00:17:28 Nicola BarberBut there has been a real interest in it, and that's what we're trying to do. Trying to meet that need, which is really, really positive.00:17:35 Nicola BarberAnd just to go back to the last question, I think that there's a real perception reality gap because you look at some of the research coming through organisations and managers might think that they can deal with conflict effectively, but when they needed a good day employee results, even in your own organisation, perhaps.00:17:54 Nicola BarberAnd when you look at like survey results around, does my line manager help to resolve conflict?00:18:00 Nicola BarberLike the result wouldn't be so positive, but yet the management side or organisational side will think. Ohh yeah, we're really good at that. So there is a definite perception on that.00:18:13 Mark McAllisterWait, wait, wait. Go ahead.00:18:15 Richard SaundryRichard, no, just, just, just just to just to back up what what what's just been said there? I mean I think it's.00:18:20 Richard SaundryA really important point.00:18:22 Glenn BakerWhat?00:18:23 Richard SaundryWe're we're doing a lot of work with line managers, means some colleagues at university. We're doing a lot of work with line manager at the moment in.00:18:28 Richard SaundryIn terms of skill development and what line managers need and want, and we're talking to a lot of those line managers and they're crying out for something, they're crying out for, for for some tools to deal with some of these issues. So there is a real need there. And I think the focus on mediation skills with Nico was just talking about, I think it's really important because if you actually break down what?00:18:51 Richard SaundryThose the the core.00:18:53 Richard SaundryYou know, for example, what mark you and your colleagues would do in in mediation if you break down the basic, the those basic skills, they can be applied to managers, they can be developed within managers, maybe not to very advanced level, but they can be used to give managers some basic techniques, some routes through having difficult conversations because.00:19:15 Richard SaundryQuite often they sit in a classroom and tell lots of things about culture or whatever else it might be, and then they go back to work and they're faced with people who don't want to talk.00:19:25 Richard SaundryTo them or?00:19:26 Richard SaundryWon't cooperate or don't want to particularly learn and.00:19:29 Richard SaundryThat those the.00:19:30 Richard SaundryThose the times we manage to say to us we need, we need some assistance in how we deal with some of these issues. It's not always straightforward.00:19:36 Richard SaundryWould and and I.00:19:38 Richard SaundryThink that you know using those types of mediative skills is a is is a.00:19:43 Richard SaundryIs a really important way.00:19:44 Mark McAllisterForward. Yeah, I think I think it's a point well made and and Nicola said about that perception camp. There definitely is, yeah, that the the notion of having that sort of corporate approach to saying you know part of our strategy this year to implement mediation skills in the organisation.00:19:57 Mark McAllisterBump that's done at the year end without assessing it on the ground to say look that you know the role plays weren't, you know, sufficiently real enough or it was far too theoretical or these aren't the common garden variety issues that are that are affecting our.00:20:13 Mark McAllisterOrganisation so an off the shelf model of training just doesn't doesn't seem to work.00:20:18 Mark McAllisterAnd that we?00:20:19 Mark McAllisterWe would hear about that disconnect very often because people would just come in and say, look, we got somebody in to do a bit of mediation training on and and and that box was ticked. There's there's a lot more to it, absolutely.00:20:29 Nicola BarberAbsolutely. But even thinking about the language and just reflecting here in our conversation.00:20:34 Nicola BarberIn organisations, do we actually say the word conflict? We call it many different things, but not actually conflict. And maybe that's part of the issue. Maybe people don't actually recognise what is.00:20:43 Mark McAllisterConflict. Yeah, I think we need to be very careful about the word conflict in the Northern Ireland context, but you're absolutely right. Language and communication is so, so vital in.00:20:52 Mark McAllisterI love this that I think sometimes you have to. You have to, you know, take a look back a bit like an impression that's painting. You stand back and look and see where everything is and say ohh. Right. OK, so that's what we've missed. Or that's where the gap is. We we hear more and more of organisations talking about, you know, we're we're failing on strategy. And if you're failing on strategy on unemployment relations.00:21:12 Mark McAllisterBasically, then, operationally you're going to be filmed as well. You know, there's no, there's, there's there's a clear causal link.00:21:18 Mark McAllisterBetween the two, Richard, any other observations on that?00:21:22 Richard SaundryWell, no, I think I think I think that's very, very true. I mean, I think I I've struggled and myself and colleagues both in sort of academic academic colleagues and in and in policy and practise, I struggle with this idea about do we need to change the language to get organisations to.00:21:38 Richard SaundryTake.00:21:39 Richard SaundryTo take these issues more seriously.00:21:42 Richard SaundryAnd I think you can dress it up in any way that you want to. 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There are also skills that they need to negotiate relationships with customers and clients.00:22:50 Richard SaundryAnd and therefore I think I think there's there's.00:22:52 Richard SaundryThere, there's there's a real overlap really in in, in the in the value and impact some of the the skills that are that we would see as core to conflict management.00:23:01 Mark McAllisterAbsolutely. Well, some fascinating insights are from Richard and Nicola, and I mean the report is focuses on that, that managerial capability of minimising workplace conflict. But it also addresses issues such as.00:23:13 Mark McAllisterProductivity and the employment relationship and the the conundrum that that presents cases being brought to. Industrial tribune.00:23:20 Mark McAllisterEarly resolution, which is obviously a a rallying cry of the Labour Relations Agency and policy implications and and recommendations there. That report will be on our website and so all that remains for me today is to thank Nicola, Barbara CIPD chair for Northern Ireland and Professor Richard Sundry, from the University of Westminster.00:23:36 Nicola BarberThank you.00:23:40 Mark McAllisterAlright.00:23:42 Mark McAllisterLovely to hear from both of you, so catch up with us on the next podcast on challenging workplaces.00:23:50 Glenn BakerJust like to thank Mark, Nicola and Richard for their contributions today. If you've enjoyed this podcast, you can listen to your others on our website at www.lra.org.uk or you can get them on Spotify as well. Thank you.00:24:03 Glenn BakerVery much. Goodbye.)