

A Top Stressor Costs Time and Money

The Cost of Interpersonal Conflict in Construction

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Overview

Interpersonal conflict is identified as one of the top occupational stressors, strongly linked to a reduction in psychological and physical health. In addition, it has been identified as a determinant of work disability, occupational incidents, and other costs related to reduced quality, restructuring, decreased productivity, absenteeism, and employee turnover. Studies suggest that owners and contractors ranked conflict among project participants as the highest factor affecting project cost. No research studies previously existed which expose the financial cost of conflict in this industry. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the nature of interpersonal conflict on construction projects and its financial burden. Seventy-four construction industry personnel were interviewed using a protocol designed to elicit recalled conflict incidents. Forty-one of the 86 reported incidents underwent analysis using the reported time and associated labor costs. It is recommended that educational opportunities and innovative changes to the construction process could reduce the incidence of interpersonal conflict on the jobsite.

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See full report:

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Key Findings

- The average amount of time reported across all 41 analyzed conflict incidents was 161.25 hours (approximately 20 days) “lost” in managing conflict, with .5 hours as the minimum number of hours spent embroiled in a conflict and 6,000 hours as the maximum number of hours “lost” as the result of a conflict.
- The average cost reported across all 41 conflict incidents was \$10,948, with \$25 as the minimum cost for an incident and \$367,000 as the maximum cost for an incident.
- The monetary cost of an “observed” interpersonal conflict may underestimate the true monetary cost because the consequences of such behaviors can carry costs well beyond the observed incident.
- Primary trigger events attributed to interpersonal conflict that occurs on a construction jobsite are most often tied to the process of construction versus construction personnel. “I think it’s the process rather than the people” is a quote by one of the superintendents interviewed. This thought was confirmed by the analysis of the 86 recorded incidents and their associated triggers for interpersonal conflict.
- Resolution techniques most reported include verbal communication between the conflicting individuals by themselves or through the aid of a third party (supervision) as well as physically separating individuals from each other for the duration of a project.
- Construction personnel have choices to make when reacting to a primary trigger event, which can then have an impact on the strength of the consequences and, hence, the monetary cost of interpersonal conflict in construction.



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