

Report on Competencies in Conflict Management Systems Design

SPIDR's Committee on Credentials, Competencies and Qualifications

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Preface

The Organizational Conflict Management Section of the Society of Professionals in Dispute Resolution (SPIDR) exists to help members excel at developing integrated organizational conflict management systems, so that organizations improve their ability to deal with conflict.

Following the 1999 SPIDR Organizational Conflict Management Section meeting, a committee composed of Section members was established to examine and make recommendations on the competencies that practitioners in conflict management systems design should strive to attain. This undertaking builds on the work of SPIDR's Committee on Credentials, Competencies and Qualifications, or 3CQ, which is the body charged with recommending a practical direction for SPIDR to take in these areas.

On behalf of the Organizational Conflict Management Sector, this working paper represents the Committee's first contribution to recommending competencies that systems design practitioners should aim for in order to carry out their work in a professional manner. Beyond the interests of SPIDR members, the scope of this working paper has been expanded to respond to the interests and needs of organizations in seeking this expertise, and of students aspiring to this discipline.

We note that SPIDR's Track I Committee has offered guidelines for implementing conflict management systems to deal with parties external to organizations and is now drafting guidelines for conflict management systems to deal with conflict within organizations. Their work focuses on implementing systems, and ours on competencies.

Introduction

As organizations become increasingly interdependent and experience rapid change both internally and externally, they inevitably encounter diverse and complex challenges. Failure to deal with such challenges in a constructive way can pose a significant drain on human and financial resources.

A proactive approach to managing conflict can clarify issues, interests, and facts, foster creativity, and help to develop more constructive working relationships. Organizations that manage differences in a constructive and sustainable manner can realize substantial gains in productivity, cost savings, and interpersonal and workplace morale. Conflict management system design provides an innovative and effective avenue for organizations and their employees to develop the necessary tools and skills to achieve these and other benefits.

The use of conflict management system design is growing throughout the public and private sectors in the United States and Canada. Efforts that are focused on conflict within the workplace include:

- the introduction of interest-based processes such as mediation;
- the appointment of an organizational ombuds;
- the integration of mediation clauses into collective agreements in unionized workplaces; and

- system-wide implementation that serves as a strategic basis for facilitating change within organizations.

Efforts that focus on managing conflict between an organization and external parties include:

- mediation and other programs for administrative tribunals or regulatory bodies;
- corporate programs that apply conflict management externally (e.g. to disputes with suppliers or customers); and
- conflict management protocols and/or structures inserted into such agreements as: joint venture, partnering, purchase and sale; shareholder; supply; lease; license; dealership or distributorship; and franchise agreements.

Experience shows that for conflict management practices and systems to be effective and sustainable, they need to be tailored and adaptable to the distinct interests and needs of organizations. This working paper will describe the competencies needed to design and implement conflict management practices and systems.

Premises

The following premises guide the Committee's work:

- a conflict management practice or system should aim to prevent conflict and encourage the early resolution of conflict whenever possible;
- design initiatives will vary depending on the timeframes, financial and human resources available to the organization;
- organizations should deal with interpersonal and other workplace conflict in a proactive and systemic manner;
- well-designed and implemented conflict management practices and systems can dramatically improve the lives of all persons in organizations (managers, employees, teams, etc.), improve productivity, and lessen unnecessary litigation and grievances;
- the effects of a well-designed and implemented conflict management practice or system can reach beyond the workplace to improve relationships with those with whom an organization interacts, such as clients, patients, vendors, students, etc.; and
- organizations with well-designed conflict management practices and systems are more likely to succeed in today's rapidly changing economic and work environments.

Audiences

This work is intended for three key audiences:

- *Organizational Leaders* - people in organizations who wish to create or improve a conflict management system;
- *Practitioners* - persons or groups that assist with or lead the design and implementation of a conflict management system or processes in an organization; and
- *Students* - persons learning the work of designing and implementing conflict management practices and systems.

Definitions

The following definitions apply in this working paper:

- *Conflict* - we intentionally use the term "conflict" as a descriptor, rather than "dispute," because "conflict" is a broader and more encompassing term. Conflict is defined by Rubin, Pruitt and Kim (1994) as a "perceived divergence of interest, or a belief that the parties' current aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously." Disputes, on the other hand, are manifest disagreements, often following legal or quasi-legal or otherwise confrontational procedures (such as complaints, charges,

grievances, and lawsuits). Conflict embraces all the differences between persons, whether or not they become disputes.

- *System* - a set of interdependent parts that make a whole. Each part of a system influences the other parts.
- *Interest-Based Process* - a process in which parties retain control of and develop their own solutions. Mediation is a commonly used interest-based process for conflict resolution.
- *Rights-Based Process* - a process in which a third party imposes a decision on disputants on the basis of their "rights" as defined in laws, contracts, rules, or regulations. Litigation and grievance processes are examples of rights-based processes used to resolve conflict.
- *Power-Based Process* - a process in which someone is coerced to do something she or her would otherwise not so. Strikes and lockouts are examples of power-based conflict resolution process.
- *Participative Design Process* - a process in which members of various constituencies in an organization play a role in shaping a conflict management program. The nature of this role will vary depending on the project and the organizational culture, among other factors. We use "participative design process" to mean what Costantino and Merchant called "interest-based design" and what Slaikeu and Hasson call "using the mediation model to build consensus among decision makers and users."

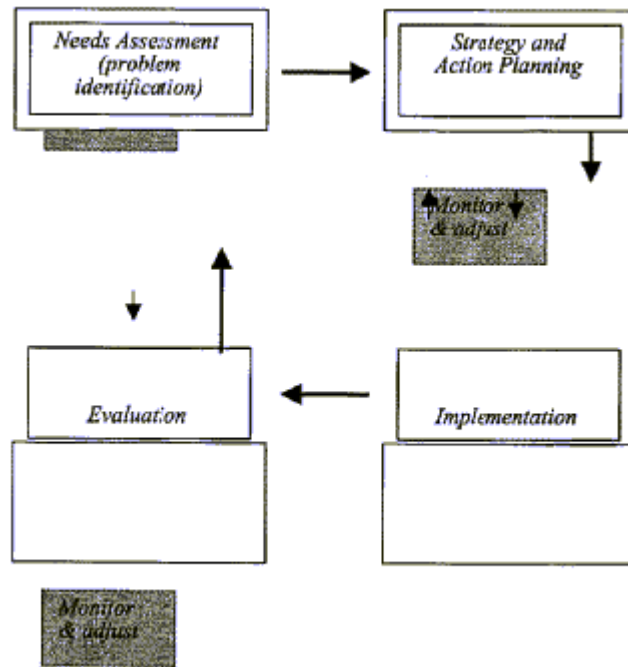
Designing Conflict Management Systems

System Planning

Designing an effective conflict management system is a complex task. Experience has taught us that such tasks should be approached in an organized manner. To help you do this, in this section we will present a planning model that begins with an assessment of an organization's needs and moves through the steps of planning, implementation, and evaluation.

It is important to understand that this model does not prescribe a particular solution. To the contrary, because the design is based on each organization's unique needs and circumstances, using this planning model will ensure that the conflict management system will better serve each client's distinct requirements. An example of an application of this model is illustrated in Appendix I.

In conflict management systems design, the critical steps of monitoring and evaluation are often neglected. These tasks have at least two functions: program improvement throughout the life of a project, and summation of the project's outcomes. Monitoring and evaluation ought to be planned as part of the action planning stage and used continuously, even though the chart below focuses on their use after program implementation, to determine how the system may be improved.



Design Team

Ideally, the design process is led by a team of persons who are both internal and external to the organization, and who together bring specialized knowledge and abilities to the work at hand. The participation of organizational members in the design process is essential to ensuring that the design reflects the organization's needs and ensuring "buy-in" from members of the organization. As Stephanie Carter observes,

participative dispute systems design maximizes the opportunity to go beyond simply designing a dispute resolution program to successfully creating an accessible, fair, durable, and effective organizational conflict management system developed with the parties rather than simply for them... [I]t permits organizational members to have a genuine voice not only in the design of the organization's dispute-handling system but also, in essence, in the design of the organization's future.^[1]

Competencies in Conflict Management System Design

The knowledge and abilities required for carrying out complex change work is more than can be expected of one individual. As a result, the following provides an account of the knowledge and abilities that a design/implementation team should possess. In developing the following list, the Committee seeks to identify competencies that are key to successfully designing and implementing conflict management practices and systems, *without* encouraging rigidity.

While a design team that possesses all of the following competencies is seen as ideal, this may not be achievable due to budgetary, resource, and/or other constraints on a particular project. Nevertheless, designers working alone or with a smaller team should be aware of these competencies, as each is significant in providing high quality work. Designers who recognize that they or their team are weak in a particular area should inform their client that it would be advisable to include someone with additional expertise in that area and/or make a special effort to bolster their knowledge to the extent possible.

A) Knowledge

1. Knowledge of laws and regulations that have an impact on conflict management and on organizational functioning in areas related to conflict management.

The relevant laws and regulations will depend on the jurisdiction (city, county, state, province, country, etc.) in which an organization functions, and on the persons who will use the system. Possible users include employees and internal groups, clients or customers, vendors and/or competitors. Conflict management systems must also comply with legal, contractual, and other relevant frameworks.

2. Knowledge of the dynamics of organizational change.

Organizational change is integral to the practice of conflict management systems design. Organizational change theories call upon many disciplines, including but not limited to law, organization development, organizational psychology, human resources, negotiation theory, and management. Grafted onto these disciplines are concepts about conflict resolution that have developed into theories over the past three decades. The field of Organization Development focuses on the theory and practice of managing organizational change, and emphasizes tasks such as contracting, needs assessment, the actual process of creating change in organizations, and monitoring and evaluation, which in turn lead to further change.

3. Knowledge of the design and practice of training in the workplace, including adult learning theory.

An essential component of organizational change is the effective use of training. Training adults in the workplace involves expertise about how to assess needs, design and deliver training, and evaluate effectiveness. Poor training can sabotage organizational change efforts.

4. Knowledge of conflict resolution theory, principles, and methods, particularly as they apply to the various possible conflict resolution mechanisms that are typically part of conflict management systems.

Over the past two decades a growing amount of theory about conflict has been developed. Designers should understand this theory and keep up with new developments. Furthermore, design practitioners should possess accurate knowledge of what different conflict management processes entail, so as to be in a better position to discuss options with clients.

5. Keep abreast of best practices in conflict management systems design.

In addition to conflict resolution theory, design practitioners should keep up with the latest developments in systems design, including strategic considerations and lessons the initiatives have to offer.

B) Abilities

1. Ability to advise on and/or manage organizational change.

Organizational change is a difficult process to manage well. People and organizations tend to resist change. Understanding the culture of an organization, gaining the support and encouragement of organizational leaders, gaining the knowledge and participation of the majority of members of the organization, helping to identify the possible obstacles to change, ensuring that training is available to the organization, and creating systems to monitor and evaluate the change process are all aspects of managing organizational change. While these tasks are usually best performed by a team, the awareness of the components is absolutely essential for anyone in the position of managing strategic organizational change.

2. Ability to conduct a needs assessment.

Needs assessment, i.e., the process of accurately discerning the nature of the organizational needs, determining the nature of the problem an organization is having, and describing its existing conflict processes, is an essential first step in organizational change. This leads to discerning what skills people need to be trained to do, and what other changes are necessary to achieve the goals of the change effort. Part of needs assessment is diagnosis of formal and informal structures within the organization, significant relationships among persons and groups, reward systems in place, and the style(s) of the leaders

3. Ability to design and conduct adult training.

Change efforts frequently call for participants to learn new concepts or skills. Since training adults involves its own skills set, training should incorporate the concepts of adult learning theory. Training should also routinely be assessed to determine what is working well, and what needs improving.

4. Ability to design and conduct assessment and evaluation of program implementation.

The expectations and descriptions of success for conflict management practices and systems vary greatly among interested and affected parties. Accordingly, design practitioners should have or have access to very strong formal assessment and evaluation skills, and seek to build formal program assessment at regular intervals into any practice or system.

Formal assessment tools and performance measures for conflict management programs and for the organization's experiences regarding changing performance measurement of existing programs play a key role in design work. Both qualitative and quantitative data should be collected and analyzed to determine where increased efficiencies occur, and processes and methodologies adopted to verify and/or illustrate the data. The evaluation framework should allow for newly introduced practices to be tracked, help identify "lessons learned", and support continued progress towards the original goals identified in introducing the new practice or system.

5. Ability to facilitate groups and build consensus.

Good facilitation and consensus building skills are critical for including stakeholders as partners in the design process as well as ways for a designer to model interest-based processes. Such modeling is particularly important when participants doubt the value of interest-based processes. These participants often need to experience the effectiveness of these processes during the design of a conflict management system in order to accept and become advocates for that system once it is implemented.

6. Ability to design a conflict management system or to lead the design process.

Experience has shown that a design process which is highly participative, allowing participants to share in contributions and decisions, has the best chance of being integrated into an organization. Designers should therefore use such processes whenever possible and should involve the organization and various stakeholders in the design process to the greatest possible extent.

7. Ability to work collaboratively.

The way one works teaches as much as anything else one does. Because creating conflict management systems has the potential to challenge some deep beliefs about conflict and appropriate conflict behavior, designers must be able to model the behaviors they seek to foster in others. Teaching about the new system begins with the designer's first interaction with each affected and interested party.

8. Ability to assess the primary decision-making centers in an organization and to gain the support and cooperation of key decision-makers.

Effective change will not occur without support from organizational leaders, e.g. management, unions, and other key stakeholders. Therefore, relevant education and skills training should be delivered to the appropriate personnel. Design practitioners are wise to ensure that key decision-makers are kept aware and actively involved throughout the design process. This will help to ensure the resources and expertise necessary to establish and operate the program.

9. Ability to design and implement communication strategies within organizations.

Open communication is essential to interest-based processes. Practitioners should inform themselves of communication needs and of ways to meet them, particularly in organizations in which employees or managers do not have high levels of trust.

10. Ability to understand the culture of an organization and work appropriately within the context of that culture.

Each organizational culture is different, and the differences may result in differently designed conflict management systems. Systems that do not respect and work within the boundaries of the organizational culture generally will not be accepted and fully-used by those within the organization in the long run.

11. Ability to identify and incorporate reinforcement mechanisms into the change process.

Designing a system is only part of the work. Getting people to use the system is another major task. Incorporating appropriate reward systems and incentives to reinforce new conflict management behaviors can be extremely important and will help to ensure the success of the initiative. One example of this approach is integrating skills and expectations about managing conflict into a performance appraisal system.

12. Ability to relate to diverse groups of persons.

The ability to interact effectively and respectfully with persons from diverse backgrounds is essential. Further, a sensitivity to diversity is necessary to create conflict management systems that will be able to be safely used by all persons.

13. Ability to identify interest-based, rights-based and power-based processes that are in place at the time of the system design, and to integrate these into a conflict management system in an appropriate manner.

Since systems design work takes place in an organization which has a history of processes (typically power-based and rights-based, and sometimes interest-based), one should respect existing formal practices and determine which ones may be streamlined or improved, and which new processes may be introduced. This integrative approach enables a greater array of options from which parties to a dispute can choose to resolve their differences.

14. Strong interpersonal and communication skills.

In order to effectively communicate the advantages of introducing new conflict management processes and systems, a design team should possess strong communication skills in writing, speaking, and in making presentations. In addition to strong communication skills, effective interpersonal skills are key from the outset to build and maintain momentum, interest and commitment from all stakeholders to the initiative.

Beliefs

The following beliefs underlie the approach to conflict management systems design presented in this document. While the beliefs are not universally accepted, we have seen them to be integral to designing successful and sustainable conflict management systems.

1. Conflict management systems designers should work in a participative manner to the extent possible.

To assist an organization in developing a conflict management system, designers must themselves be willing to engage in interest-based processes. A designer who presents her or himself as "the expert who will dispense the solution to an organization's conflict problems" will not be able to model a process that engages members in the major organizational change that a conflict management system involves. In addition, as noted above, when one is working with people who do not believe in the value of interest-based processes, one has to be able to respond to the resistance with knowledge and experience. For example, we have seen instances in which conflict management systems have been designed well on paper, but the process left out some key decision-makers in the organization. Because of the failure to include these personnel, the resulting systems were not well used.

2. Interest-based processes and rights-based processes need to be part of conflict management systems.

An integrated conflict management system offers both interest-based and rights-based options for resolution. Individuals with conflicts should be able to choose the methods of conflict resolution they believe will be most effective and appropriate for their dispute.

3. Interpersonal relationships are important in the workplace.

Organizations are relying increasingly on teams and the exchange of information to function. From the organizational point of view, interpersonal relationships that are healthy and open will increase productivity. When interpersonal relationships are not fostered in an organization, more and more employees are finding other employment, resorting to litigation and/or not working to their full

capacity. Conflict management systems should be designed, to the extent possible, to encourage the development and maintenance of healthy and openly communicative interpersonal relationships.

4. Leaders need to model the practices they want others to carry out.

In the end, the goal of a conflict management system, especially one that emphasizes prevention and early resolution of conflicts, involves getting people to behave differently. Changing conflict behavior will be threatening for a large number of people. Thus part of the task of getting a conflict management system to work is getting people to take risks by responding differently in conflict. Experience has shown that it is far less likely that people will take such risks unless leaders model the kinds of behavior they are asking employees and counterparts to practice.

5. While the process of organizational change may present challenges and risks, it can also provide a unique opportunity for building collaborative strength and a healthier work environment.

Organizational change is ongoing and challenging. Organizations often resist change, seeking to maintain their existing condition. Today's work climate calls for more collaboration and more employee empowerment. Organizations that rise to the challenge of change can be stronger and more productive, retaining employees for longer periods of time and avoiding the strains of unmanaged conflict and the unnecessary costs of litigation.

6. A sound organizational conflict management system will enhance organizational and personal growth, thus contributing to the effectiveness and success of both.

Growth is an integral component of success. As individuals experience the results of a sound organizational conflict management system, they will become more effective in both their work and personal environments. This growth in turn will provide more successful organizational endeavors and greater employee achievements. "Success Breeds Success."

For Organizational Leaders: What to Look For

Organizations of all kinds can benefit from the prevention and early resolution of conflict. The following factors are important for the successful development of a conflict management system:

1. Is the organization ready to seriously consider change? Leaders with a creative vision can move an organization, but often pain is the impetus that moves an organization towards creating or improving a conflict management system.

2. Are leaders ready to listen? If not, the change effort is much less likely to succeed.

3. Do you have the right people to assist in designing and implementing a conflict management system? Rarely will this be a single individual, because of the wide-ranging nature of the knowledge and skills required. Those persons leading the effort can be internal staff, external consultants or a mixture of both. The aim is for the team collectively to have the knowledge and abilities set out in this document.

In order for an organization to be able to make informed decisions about conflict management systems, someone in the organization ought to:

- recognize the potential value of designing and implementing a conflict management system;
- be aware of the knowledge and skills required to design and implement a conflict management system; and
- know how to find people who have the knowledge, skills, and experience needed to design and implement a conflict management system.

Checklist for Evaluating Consultants

In looking for an internal or external consultant, you should look for a demonstration of the following knowledge and abilities. It is further recommended that you consider training and experience in addition to the project proposal and interviews. Whereas consultants need not be expert in each area, they ought to be familiar with each, and draw on other in-house or private sector individuals to construct a design team that can work to effectively meet the tasks at hand.

Does a consultant have the relevant knowledge? Specifically, does the consultant:

1. Possess knowledge of laws and regulations that have an impact on conflict management and on organizational functioning in areas related to conflict management?
2. Possess knowledge of the dynamics of organizational change?
3. Possess knowledge of the design and practice of training in the workplace, including adult learning theory?
4. Possess knowledge of conflict resolution theory, principles, and methods, particularly as they apply to the various conflict resolution mechanisms typically part of conflict management systems?
5. Keep abreast of best practices in conflict management systems design?

Does the consultant have the relevant skills? Specifically, can the consultant:

1. Advise on and/or manage organizational change
2. Conduct a needs assessment?
3. Design and conduct adult training?
4. Design and conduct assessment and evaluation of program implementation?
5. Facilitate groups and build consensus?
6. Design a conflict management system or lead the design process?
7. Work collaboratively?
8. Assess the decision-making centers in an organization and gain the support and cooperation of the key decision-makers?
9. Design and implement communication strategies within organizations?
10. Understand the culture of an organization and work appropriately in the context of that culture?
11. Identify and incorporate reinforcement mechanisms into the change process.
12. Relate to diverse groups of persons?
13. Identify interest-based, rights-based, and power-based processes that are in place at the time of the system design and integrate these into a conflict management system appropriately?
14. Demonstrate strong interpersonal and communication skills?

For Practitioners - How to Demonstrate Ability

There are several abilities that need to be demonstrated for a practitioner to become recognized as having expertise in designing and implementing conflict management practices or systems. Practitioners are encouraged to review the "Checklist for Evaluating Consultants" and to make sure that proposals, resumes and/or vitas contain the pertinent information.

For Students - How to Gain Knowledge and Experience

How does one learn the knowledge and abilities listed above, and how does one gain experience? At this time there is no industry standard for how one learns to become a designer of conflict management systems. We suggest the following as a starting point:

- Take a careful inventory of one's knowledge and skills. Students might use the lists above to assess where they stand and to determine what their subsequent priorities are.
- Take courses and/or earn a degree in one of the fields that prepare one to work with organizational change.
- Learn mediation, negotiation and/or facilitation.
- Read literature that pertains specifically to conflict management system design. A brief bibliography is offered in the appendix.
- Seek a mentor. We define a "mentor" as one who guides by sharing knowledge from experience. There are various methods for mentoring people. We expect that each has value, and the key for a student may be to have a deliberate agreement to be assisted in one of these ways. Methods include:

- Work as an apprentice. This means one works directly under the guidance of someone experienced in designing and implementing a conflict management system.
- Have an on-going arrangement to work under the advice of someone experienced in designing and implementing a conflict management system. This might include receiving instruction and direction as one works.
- Have an on-going arrangement with someone experienced in designing and implementing conflict management systems who will give feed-back on work-in-progress and/or to be a resource who can be called upon as needed.
- Work on a team with more experienced practitioners.

APPENDIX I

Conflict Management System Planning

The following provides an illustration of how conflict management system planning has been used at the Department of National Defence (DND) /Canadian Forces

Phase 1: Identify and Describe Problems and Needs

- Gather information about DND and its organization. (This will include such things as: base/wing structure at pilot sites; relationships between military/civilian; mechanisms for disseminating information; enough knowledge of structure to ensure program is supported)
- Gather information about conflict management problems in DND. This will be used as part of the needs analysis and will also provide the baseline data for program monitoring and evaluation.
- Prepare an inventory of existing and proposed mechanisms of conflict management within DND
- Prepare a conflict management needs assessment.

Product: DND Conflict Management Needs Assessment

Phase 2: Develop an Action Plan (in this case, for the pilot projects)

- In the specified locations, need to define the units and structures within which the pilot projects will be implemented
- Select the individuals who will be involved in the planning and implementation of the pilot projects
- Pilot system design - need to select the specific program structures and methods to be used
- Determine the goals and objectives of the program
- Based on training needs, set training program standards
- Prepare a work plan

Product: Action Plan for Each of the Pilot Sites

Phase 3: Carry Out the Action Plan

- Obtain support for the program. An important component of this will be the communication plan.
- Conduct training for those selected at each pilot site
- Establish operating procedures at each pilot site. This will include developing a system describing how individuals can access the program
- Deliver the program

Product: Implemented Program

Phase 4: Monitor and Evaluate the Program

- Monitor the program's implementation
- Evaluate the program's impact
- Write an evaluation report

Product: Information to determine whether the program has been properly implemented, if it should continue, and how it should change.

APPENDIX II

Draft Statement on the Ethical Guidelines of the Professional Responsibility of Conflict Management System Designers*

SPIDR Members and Associates are involved, among other initiatives, in designing conflict management systems for organizations. The Organizational Conflict Management Sector of SPIDR proposes the following as general guidelines for the ethical standards of professional responsibility of system designers.

Systems designers have a duty to their clients, to the profession, and to themselves to be diligent, to act in good faith, and not to seek to advance their own interests at the expense of the client. Designers should only accept responsibility where they have sufficient knowledge regarding the design and subject matter to be effective and efficient.

Systems design practitioners are to conduct themselves in a professional manner and to demonstrate a high level of competency in their work, as discussed in greater detail below. Systems designers are to demonstrate honesty, integrity, and the exercise of good judgment in their work. Further, systems designers are to exhibit an open and unbiased approach to the clients and other stakeholder groups. Systems designers are to maintain information about the client in confidence, unless directed otherwise.

Practitioners are also responsible to explain their role and the basis of compensation, fees, and charges at the outset of the project. They are to keep their clients regularly informed of developments and challenges throughout the duration of the initiative. As systems design generally entails a team approach, practitioners have an obligation to work together collaboratively and keep each other informed throughout the duration of the project.

As the SPIDR Ethical Standards of Professional Responsibility state, "All advertising must honestly represent the services to be rendered. No claims of specific results or promises that imply favor of one side over another for the purpose of obtaining business should be made. No commissions, rebates, or other similar forms of remuneration should be given or received by a neutral for the referral of clients."

Finally, system design practitioners have a responsibility to maintain and improve their professional knowledge and skills. More experienced practitioners should participate in mentoring new practitioners in the field and engage in efforts to educate the public about the value and use of conflict management system design. Where appropriate, practitioners should provide pro bono services.

* based in part on SPIDR's Ethical Standards of Professional Responsibility

APPENDIX III

Committee Members

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