

THE DISCOURSE OF CONFLICT IN MANAGING DISTANCE EDUCATION PROJECTS

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ABSTRACT

Distance education institutions are characterised by the conduct of projects, effected through project teams. Conflicts often arise as teams strive to solve problems collaboratively, using language as medium through which disagreements either escalate or are repaired. The investigation sought to:

- a. establish the discourse associated with conflict; and
- b. analyse discourse to determine the impact of conflict on relations and task performance.

Discourse was measured using a conversational framework and views and attitudes solicited through a questionnaire. Episodes of conflict were audio-recorded then analysed to establish patterns of communication. This was supported with responses to questionnaires, leading to several conclusions including that there is limited awareness about the link between language and work-related conflicts; and that conflicts impact negatively on productivity. It was then recommended that organisations should expose project team members to maxims of communication that have the effect of lessening conflicts.

Keywords: Conflict, discourse, conversation, politeness.