“Peace is not the absence of Conflict but the presence of creative alternatives for responding to conflict”  

The damaging effects of conflict in the Australian workplace have long been recognised and acknowledged both in terms of overt and hidden costs. However actual dollars have been difficult to assess and Finance departments generally sink these into the bottom line of Human Resource costs, contributing to the long held belief that HR is expensive and does not represent value for money. What is clear is that conflict, when not managed, or worse when managed badly, results in toxic cultures, poor staff health, lost customers, diminished profit as well as exhausted and unmotivated personnel with mounting Workers Compensation claims which increase insurance premiums.

Unresolved conflict can explode into industrial and legal forums which undermine business and damage people. Private businesses generally have practices in place to address the cost of conflict and many now appreciate the effectiveness and efficiency of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) solutions. However, in the main, Australian Government departments have been slower to advance in this sphere. Within NSW Government departments are frequently restrained by strict policy guidelines, frustrated within a deadlock of negative union dynamics and unmotivated by the private sector drive for profit. Against this background many have been slow to appreciate and utilise ADR practices, to their very real cost.

One NSW Government department has separated from the herd and addressed the problem with thought, innovation and creativity to move positively into the next decade. A successful business case for a new model of conflict management and resolution presents compelling financial evidence of the need for change and sets cutting edge practices for cutting the cost of conflict. Based on the principle of formal processes being the last, not the first step, the model drives change looking through a Conflict Management Coaching prism which may either immediately resolve issues or forms the first step for further resolution processes such as Team Facilitation or Mediation. Conflict Management Coaching is offered early, creating an opportunity for individuals to be guided by a trained coach through a powerful, structured process where they unpack the conflict, reflect on what has occurred, consider their own and others’ perspectives, gain insights into contributing factors, and so generate then evaluate their options for managing or resolving the conflict.

With respect to the approach at the National Mediation Conference, the business case will be presented and explained with the audience then becoming involved through relevant interactive role play. They are encouraged to examine: What we know and how we know it as well as asked to challenge our thinking, reflect on innovation and become more flexible and creative.

1 Dorothy Thompson 9 July 1893 – 30 January 1961, Time Magazine 1939
2 CINERGY® model of Conflict Management Coaching, a unique process developed by Cinie Noble of Toronto, Canada.