According to the reading from the Activity “Case Studies,” why are organizations relying on human resources departments more to handle conflict situations?

The article never once refers to HR ever handling conflict situations. In fact, there is never once a reference to a human resource department, but the article does make a point to explain that rights-based pathways, such as a formal complaint or suit, may not solve the problem. Reportedly, most employees fear the negative consequences of reporting harassment such as retaliation or ejection by co-workers.

Problems such as harassment cause anxiety, as a result, the alleviation of anxiety is in everyone's interests. The article explains that interest-based techniques are considered better methods of dispute resolution over rights-based pathways because they result in lower transaction costs, greater satisfaction with outcomes, less strain on the parties' relationship, and lower recurrence of disputes (Costantino and Merchant, 1996, pp. 45-46). Family systems theory possesses that all stakeholders are affected by others' emotions as groups function as an electrical circuit where anxiety flows from one person to another because anxiety creates a reactive atmosphere. An interest-based approach is better suited to resolve conflict because focusing on interests can bring understanding. The key to reducing anxiety is the process of differentiation.

Family systems theory is a useful theoretical framework, particularly for Ombudsman. Informally, problems can be resolved by helping people work through conflict. The Ombudsman can help bring about greater understanding by being indifferent and separate. An ombudsman can listen, facilitate a dialogue, bring perspective for problem-solving, and mediate conflict. Further, an ombudsman promotes through communication the resolution of anxiety.

As a result, the ER/HR professional is not a good choice for an ombudsman as they cannot always extend complete confidentiality because their role is not entirely neutral. ER/HR professionals are part of the management structure, and they must directly represent and protect the interests of the organization. Because of this, the requirements of the role of Ombudsman is outside of their ability.

When should third parties be brought in to help resolve workplace conflicts?

Since Ombudsman services are impartial and confidential, their services should be employed in the initial stages of any conflict. Once conflict grows to the point where anxiety promotes action employees begin to pay costs.

Do you believe that human resources personnel can be “neutral” third parties when mediating conflicts between employees and employers? Why or why not?

I believe that HR cannot be neutral; however, there is a point that action from HR is required. HR is empowered to offer solutions such as formal counseling, drug rehab, or even leave of absence. They further have the resource of alternative job placement or an official reprimand. Ombudsman is a great idea theoretically but maybe only useful practically in just the initial stages of conflict -- unfortunately, by the time one realizes there is a conflict it is usually past the initial stages.

Now, based on what you have read in the Activity, what would you say to a coworker who came to you for help resolving a conflict?

I may ask to hear the conflict issue, then determine which of the two to recommend -- HR or Ombudsman.