CONFLICT AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN ORGANIZATIONS: A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

Jacob Bercovitch

Introduction

Research into behaviour in organizations can be divided into two categories: normative and descriptive. Normative research is concerned with how things should be, whereas descriptive research addresses itself to what is — rather than what could or should be. This dual perspective is most apparent in approaches to the issues of conflict and conflict management in organizations. Normative approaches reflect attitudes and beliefs which identify all conflicts as destructive and promote conflict-elimination as the formula for organizational success. Descriptive approaches accept conflict as inevitable and consider its proper management the primary responsibility of all administrators. This paper pertains to the descriptive mode of inquiry in presenting a framework for the study of conflict in organizations. But it goes beyond this domain in suggesting that administrators must take the offensive and seek to manage conflict, and also in advocating that traditional methods of dealing with conflict be replaced by a new and more sophisticated approach.

Conflict: Towards a Definition

Conflict is endemic to all social life. It is an inevitable part of living because it is related to situations of scarce resources, division of functions, power relations and role-differentiation. Because of its ubiquity and pervasive nature, the concept has acquired a multitude of meanings and connotations presenting us with nothing short of a semantic jungle. Like other terms, conflict generates considerable ambivalence and leaves many scholars and administrators quite uncertain about (1) its meaning and relevance and (2) how best to cope with it.

The normative conception of conflict, strongly influenced by a preoccupation with stability and equilibrium in organizational design, links conflict to violence, destruction, inefficiency and irrationality.[1] This form of intellectual myopia was especially invidious in suggesting that administrators have the responsibility of avoiding, controlling or eliminat-

Jacob Bercovitch is Lecturer in Political Science at the University of Canterbury.

ing conflict.[2] Descriptive approaches challenge the whole basis and rationale of these assumptions. They permit us to depart from an out-moded paradigm by suggesting that any social interaction in which the parties (however they may be structured or defined) compete for scarce resources or values has the potential for conflict.[3] Using the term in a broad sense we suggest that conflict refers to all kinds of antagonistic interactions. More specifically, it can be defined as a situation in which two or more parties have incompatible objectives and in which their perceptions and behaviour are commensurate with that incompatability.[4]

This definition is purposely broad. It suggests that conflict is a social phenomemon that is found in personal, group or organizational inter-actions. As such it comprises several dimensions. Fink[5] distinguishes between (1) antagonistic-psychological relations and (2) antagonistic be-haviour, whereas Pondy[6] observes that conflict is made up of (1) antecedent conditions, (2) affective conditions, (3) cognitive conditions and (4) behavioural conditions. We advance a conception of conflict which emphasizes its three, interrelated dimensions, namely: (1) conflict situation (the basic incompatibility), (2) conflict attitudes (range of psychological factors) and (3) conflict behaviour (set of related behaviour).[7]

Conflict refers to more than just overt behaviour. Concentrating only upon its behavioural manifestation is an extremely limiting exercise. The three-dimensional conception of conflict emphasizes the need to consider the situation in which parties (individuals, groups or organizations) come to possess incompatible goals, their structure of interaction and the nature of their goals. We have to consider emotional (e.g. distrust) and cognitive (e.g. stereotyping) orientations that accompany a conflict situation as well as the range of action undertaken by any party in a situation of conflict.

Administrators often feel that discussions of fundamental terms are merely academic. This is not always the case. Effective action and sensible responses depend upon clear thinking and systematic analysis. Under-standing must precede action. If administrators consider the problem of conflict and understand that conflicts stem from ineradicable human qualities and are related to situations of interdependence, scarce resources and perceptions of incompatibility,[8] they might readily accept conflict and recognize its values — provided, that is, they are properly aware of "conflict management" and the need to find a solution. Both conflict management and a satisfactory solution are easier to attain when it is accepted that what we normally call conflict is a complex, multi-dimensional phenomenon. It is not caused by "inadequate" structures, nor is it undesirable. It is natural and inevitable and, properly managed, it is productive, relevant and creative.

Conflict in Organizations

Organizations are living systems consisting of interacting units performing a task in a mutually dependent manner within a structure of scarce resources.[9] It seems commonplace to suggest that conflicts would be present in such a setting. The parties in an organization may have a conflict about the distribution of resources, or they may have a more fundamental conflict about the very structure of their organization and the basic nature of their interaction.[10] Once the parties are in a situation of goal incompatibility, their conflict develops in a dynamic fashion, initiating valuable and much-needed constructive changes or leading to escalating strategies and destructive consequences.[11]

As there is nothing pre-determined about its course or development, it seems erroneous to view conflict from a negative perspective only — as destructive or dysfunctional. It is true that conflict may be uncomfortable, it may even be a source of problems, but it is absolutely necessary if change is to occur, if organizations are to survive and adapt. Organizational change and innovation does not just happen, it requires a stimulant. That stimulant is conflict.

Administrators must accept the need to influence the developmental dynamics of a conflict, so that the parties' attitudes and actions will lead to better coordination and a more appropriate interdependence. They must not seek to stifle or eliminate organizational conflict — for that is hardly a realistic goal. As Rico has noted, an organization devoid of conflict "... may indicate autocracy, uniformity, stagnation and mental fixity."[12] It would also be protecting only the vested interests of the *status quo*. Administrators must accept and indeed occasionally encourage conflict, because change and other desirable consequences are products of conflict.[13] The challenge administrators face is to utilize such conflict management techniques that would ensure that as a conflict passes from a latent to a manifest phase, it proceeds towards its potential and realizes its constructive values.

Analyzing Organizational Conflict

Three distinct criteria define the role of an administrator in an organization: planning, resource allocation and conflict management.[14] There is no doubt that managing conflict permeates every aspect of the administrative role. Awareness of the various forms of conflict management that can be employed at different stages of the development of a conflict is vital, if administrators are to organize efforts towards influencing the conflict situation, the parties' attitudes or their behaviour. In addition to that,

effective conflict management requires a recognition of the sources that generate a conflict. What, then, are the sources or bases of organizational conflicts?

Sources of Conflict. Organizational conflict appears in a variety of forms and has varying causes. These can generally be separated into several categories. Katz[15] identifies three sources of conflict. These are: (1) structural conflict (conflict arising out of the need to manage the interdependence between different organizational sub-units), (2) role conflict (conflict arising from sets of prescribed behaviour) and (3) resources conflict (conflict stemming from interest groups competing for organizational resources). Robbins[16] identifies three sources of organizational conflict and indicates that an understanding of the source of a conflict improves the probability of effective conflict management. The main factors which serve as sources of conflict are identified as (1) communicational (conflicts arising from misunderstandings etc.), (2) structural (conflicts related to organizational roles), and (3) personal (conflicts stemming from individual differences). Methods of conflict management which are appropriate in one case may not necessarily be appropriate when applied to a conflict generated from another source.

Here I wish to suggest a different perspective which traces the source of organizational conflict to the unit of analysis involved. Units of analysis are the parties to a conflict. They perceive, initiate and sustain a conflict. Their characteristics specify the conditions which affect the course of a conflict and determine the mode of its management. Thus, we have conflicts that originate in the individual person, conflicts that have their basis in the relationship between individuals, and conflicts that occur as a result of interactions between groups.[17] These may be described as (1) intrapersonal conflict, (2) interpersonal conflict, and (3) interdepartmental conflict. Each of these categories raises different questions about the three interrelated components of conflict and each emphasizes different aspects of conflict management.

Intrapersonal Conflict. Intrapersonal conflict is internal to the individual (though its effects can profoundly influence organizational functioning) and is perhaps the most difficult form of conflict to analyze and manage. Intrapersonal conflict is basically a conflict between two incompatible tendencies. It arises when a stimulus evokes two different and incompatible tendencies and the individual is required to discriminate between these tendencies. In such a situation it is common for individuals to experience frustrations and to allow their conflict situation to be expressed in a range of behavioural strategies ranging from apathy and boredom to absenteeism, excessive drinking or destructive behaviour.[18] If

such behavioural consequences are to be avoided, then it is essential to diagnose individual perception and utilize some techniques that would reduce anxiety-eliciting stimuli and increase consonance between individual behaviour and organizational requirements.

Interpersonal Conflict. Interpersonal conflict emphasizes the interaction of human factors in an organization. Here we are concerned with these factors as they appear in a dyadic relationship. We can broadly suggest two classes of factors as conflict sources. These are:

1. **Personal.** Individuals are not identical, constant or consistent. When two individuals are brought together and kept together, each with his own qualities, needs and skills, a conflict may ensue if their attributes are not meshed together in a coordinated way. Interaction between individuals with different attitudes, values and needs can produce conflict behaviour and affect organizational performance.[19]

2. **Functional.** Individuals in organizations have roles which are expected sets of behaviour associated with their position. In theory, individuals are not expected to engage in any discretionary behaviour. Such specification would be consistent with organizational preferences for consistency and predictability. In practice, however, role specifications tend to be ambiguous and incomplete, and in their interaction with others, some individuals often feel dissatisfied with their role or position, or they may feel that their aspirations for higher positions are being frustrated. Interpersonal conflict can be accounted for, to a great extent, in terms of the incumbents' roles and their expectations in particular situations.

Interdepartmental Conflict. The third major cause of organizational conflict is structural. Organizations are designed around product lines, regions or technical specialities. These activities are assigned to departments that often have mutually exclusive structured interests and goals and that interact within a framework of scarce resources and task dependence. When resources are relatively fixed and when one department's gain is at the expense of another, conflict should be expected.[20] If two sub-units in an organizational system have differentiated goals and are functionally interdependent, conditions exist for conflict. Interdependence produces the need for collaboration, but it also presents occasions for conflict.

Other contextual factors which affect the interaction structure between departments and create the conditions for interdepartmental conflict include: different attitudes between line and staff units, organizational size (directly related to level of conflict) and standardization (inversely related to conflict), physical or communicational barriers between departments, unequal access to authority, rewards or organizational resources and ambiguity or uncertainty in assigning tasks or rewards

to different departments.[21]

These, then, are the sources of conflict situations in organizations. How a conflict situation will change over time, how its interrelated components will alter and the environment in which it occurs will respond, is dependent upon the administrator's efforts to manage or influence it. This, in turn, is related to one's understanding of the source of a specific conflict situation.

Conflict Management

Ways of managing organizational conflict are as varied as its causes, origins and contexts. The purpose of conflict management, whether undertaken by the parties in conflict or whether involving the intervention of an outside party, is to affect the entire structure of a conflict situation so as to contain the destructive components in the conflict process (e.g. hostility, use of violence) and help the parties possessing incompatible goals to find some solution to their conflict. Effective conflict management succeeds in (1) minimizing disruption stemming from the existence of a conflict, and (2) providing a solution that is satisfactory and acceptable. We describe efforts directed towards containing or limiting some aspects of behaviour as strategies of conflict settlement and efforts directed towards the parties' attitudes, situations as well as behaviour as strategies of conflict resolution. Skilled administrators are aware of these methods and techniques and know how to utilize them effectively.

All organizations, however simple or complex, possess a range of mechanisms or procedures for managing conflict. These are built into the organizational structure and are consciously employed by administrators to influence the course and development of a conflict. The success or effectiveness of such procedures can be gauged by the extent to which they limit conflict behaviour and the extent to which they help to achieve a satisfactory solution. It is the contention of this article that strategies of conflict avoidance, conflict prevention or institutionalization of conflict will change or replace coercive behaviour, but that only the injection of a behavioural social scientist, acting in a facilitative, non-directive and non-evaluative fashion, will achieve a resolution with respect to the basic issues, attitudes and structure of interaction. If administrators care for optimal methods of conflict management, they should give their strongest support to a strategy that can end a conflict in a satisfactory and self-perpetuating manner.

All this is not to contend, however, that conflict resolution is the immediate outcome of any intervention. The outcome of a conflict

depends upon many aspects of the conflict process prior to the efforts to manage it (e.g. issues in conflict, relative power of actors, degree of proximity etc.). What I am suggesting is that if four basic conflict outcomes may be distinguished — namely (1) withdrawal, (2) imposition or dominance, (3) compromise and a (4) creative, problem-solving resolution[22] — then the most likely mode by which outcome (4) may be reached pertains to the voluntary intervention of an outside consultant acting as a professional helper. Let me then present a model of conflict management which can describe the relationship between modalities of conflict management and conflict outcomes and give some directions for managing organizational conflict.

Managing Intrapersonal Conflict

Intrapersonal conflict is predicated upon an incongruity between individual needs and organizational requirements. Intrapersonal conflict unfolds over time and manifests itself in a complex and multiform range of attitudinal and behavioural consequences. These may vary from psychosomatic consequences (e.g. frustration, emotional instability) to physical consequences (e.g. absenteeism, destructive behaviour). As such consequences are obviously correlated with decreased performance and work-motivation, managing intrapersonal conflict will help the individual to promote his capacity for adaptation and attain an equilibrium in his relationship with the organization.

Personal existence is, inevitably, punctuated by conflicts and other emotionally charged experiences. When a person experiences an inner conflict and feels that he can not master his situation, or change his environment, a number of methods of conflict management can be employed. These are conveniently divided into (1) cognitive strategies and (2) behavioural strategies. Cognitive strategies, often called defence mechanisms, help an individual to falsify, distort or deny a particular conflict. Cognitive strategies represent an attempt to control or manage negative and disturbing feelings associated with conflict and to allow an individual to carry on with his normal activities. Cognitive strategies include repression (an attempt to push conflict out of existence), rationalization (hiding the truth from oneself), fantasy or even denial of reality. Behavioural strategies for coping with intrapersonal conflict include escape, withdrawal and aggression (especially against convenient targets).

These strategies can not resolve intrapersonal conflict in any permanent way. They can be successful in the short-run. They can help an individual to reduce his level of anxiety and diminish his tension. They can prevent or avoid disruptive behaviour, but they can not generate a

solution. This can come about through the involvement of an expert-consultant, acting in an accepting manner and encouraging the individual to evaluate his situation rationally and decide upon more effective responses. Interventions in intrapersonal conflicts entail consideration of substantive issues, discussions and self-observations, helping an individual to unload his burdensome thoughts and reactions and reorienting his thinking towards a more benevolent and self-maintaining pattern of behaviour.[23]

The strength of this approach to conflict management is that it helps an individual to concentrate on his situation and on ways to evaluate alternatives that may have gone unnoticed. The consultant remains detached from an individual, but his intervention, listening, probing, interviewing and explicit confrontation of the conflict issues, sets the basis for self-diagnosis and improved performance. It eliminates distortion and increases self-knowledge. It is a method which seeks not merely an amelioration of the surface symptoms, but a successful change in the situational (e.g. reevaluating a conflict situation), attitudinal (e.g. reduced anxiety, increased self-esteem) and behavioural (e.g. stimulate productive behaviour) components of a conflict.[24]

Consultants may be internal to an organization, or they may be introduced by an administrator when circumstances require it. They have several roles to play, all intended to aid a person to be more effective in his organization.[25] What characterizes all these roles is that they are enacted in an informal and flexible fashion and in a facilitative and diagnostic manner. Techniques which are congruent with implementing the consultant's role include (1) facilitative techniques (e.g. facilitating individual exploration and self-observation, giving information, advice, reassurance and encouragement), (2) behavioural modification techniques (e.g. establish, through negative or positive reinforcement, contingencies of behaviour that should be decreased) and (3) cognitive techniques (e.g. learn to undo old values and acquire a new perception of the self).[26]

When organizations experience difficulties as a result of intrapersonal conflicts, administrators would be well-advised to manage such conflicts by leading their organization to seek professional help from persons who are trained to fulfil the role of organizational consultants. Successful organizational change does, after all, depend upon a strong commitment to conflict resolution.

Managing Interpersonal Conflict

Interpersonal interactions are extraordinarily complex. Individuals are brought together and kept together because of personal attraction or com-

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plementary needs. A great deal of individual behaviour takes place in organizations (university, hospital, factory) in which they occupy various positions. Such positions are interlocked or interdependent so that the attitudes and behaviour of one individual affect the attitudes and behaviour of another. Indeed, we may describe organizations as networks of repetitive, reciprocal and predictable interactions between individuals.[27]

Although persons in an organization interact in a relatively consistent way along a stable-cooperative dimension (organizations develop norms to ensure stable interactions), interpersonal conflict is an essential aspect of organizational life. The causes of interpersonal conflict in organizations can be ascribed to personal differences (interaction between dissimilar people maximizes conflict potential), perceptual differences (individuals perceive an unfair allocation of organizational resources) and functional differences (conflicts arising from incompatible role requirements). On the whole interpersonal conflict generates new ideas and work patterns, but when it is augmented by personal distrust, misperception and competition, it can very easily be transformed into destructive and costly behaviour.[28] To avoid detrimental effects on individual as well as organizational functioning, administrators need to identify the causes of interpersonal conflict and take appropriate action to deal with it.

Following Blake and Mouton,[29] I can suggest five possible modes of conflict management: withdrawal, smoothing, compromise, forcing and problem-solving. Withdrawal is an attempt to manage interpersonal conflict by avoidance. Smoothing involves emphasis of common, organizational interests and yielding by one or both parties. Compromise is an attempt to manage conflict by expecting each person to give up something. Forcing occurs when interpersonal conflict is managed in a fashion which compels one person to acquiesce. Problem-solving is an attempt to achieve close collaboration and integrative decision-making between individuals.

Under the prevailing influence of behaviourism, interpersonal conflict management has been directed mainly towards the behavioural components of a conflict situation. Attitudes and perceptions have been considered beyond the realm of conflict management. As a result of this, conflict management has tended to force individuals to choose between fixed and simplified behavioural alternatives, defined in terms of two rigid behavioural goals, winning or losing. The choices and incentives associated with this orientation of victory versus defeat were strongly constrained, forcing individuals into relatively primitive modes of interaction and providing administrators with an untrustworthy vehicle for potential conflict management.

Of the five methods of managing interpersonal conflict it appears that problem-solving is the only method that is directed towards the

attitudinal, situational and behavioural components of conflict. It is the only method that does not focus on relatively automatic, unthinking responses. It is the only method which seeks to utilize higher mental processes to achieve a high-quality, integrative and satisfying outcome.[30]

Empirical support for the notion that problem-solving is the most effective method for dealing with the underlying problem and feelings of interpersonal conflict and generating a sound resolution may be obtained from a number of studies. Lawrence and Lorsch[31] examined the use of the various conflict management methods in six organizations and concluded that the highest performing organizations used problem-solving to a greater extent than other organizations. Burke[32] asked seventy-four administrators to describe the way they dealt with conflicts and, in comparing scores of constructive conflict management, found that the most effective administrators used problem-solving methods (followed by smoothing and compromise). In a second study[33] he compared fifty-three descriptions of effective conflict management with fifty-three descriptions of ineffective conflict management from fifty-seven administrators and found that 58.5 per cent of statements about effective conflict management related to problem-solving (followed by 24.5 per cent for forcing and 11.3 per cent for compromise). Organizations that can increase the use of problem-solving in interpersonal conflict can offer a better working experience, more constructive consequences and a more creative conflict resolution.

Problem-solving as a method of conflict management is not a common experience. A number of elements or conditions have to be present if problem-solving is to be realized. These conditions appear to be as follows:[34]

Situational requirements (e.g. informality and flexibility of interactions, absence of time pressures, power symmetry etc.).

Attitudinal requirements (e.g. trust and confidence in each other, belief in conflict resolution rather than conflict avoidance etc.).

Perceptual requirements (e.g. individuals do not perceive threats or need to win or dominate the other) and

Behavioural requirements (e.g. free information, definition of issues, discussion of alternatives, exhaustive search for solutions etc.).

On the whole these requirements are absent in dyadic conflict management where individuals' responses are as likely to escalate as to reduce conflict. The implication of this is that parties outside the dyad must intervene to alter the fundamental parameters of individual interactions in organizations and to introduce the conditions which are suitable to problem-solving. The intervention of a behavioural consultant — either from within or outside the organization — can achieve this goal.

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Consultation-based approaches to interpersonal conflict focus on understanding the psychological and operational environment of an individual, utilizing behavioural scientists in a supportive-facilitative way and promoting the establishment of problem-solving. Interventions by behavioural consultants may take the form of offering theoretical inputs (e.g. providing individuals with conceptions about conflict), offering content observation (e.g. suggesting various outcome interpretations) and offering process observations (e.g. increasing productive interactions through openness, synchronization of efforts etc.). They give individuals the freedom, opportunity and motivation to move away from rigid behaviour or from reiterating their positions as prescribed by organizational norms. They address themselves to the attitudinal and behavioural dimensions of interactions and in combining task and socio-emotional activities, they exemplify and help to establish the conditions of problem-solving.[35]

In contrast to other methods of conflict management, the intervention of a behavioural consultant accentuates the positive and highlights commonly held views of the actors. Applications of this approach in the interpersonal sphere rest upon the following assumptions:

1.   Deficiencies in perception are the main cause of interpersonal conflict.

2.   Barriers to improved information prolong and aggravate a conflict.

3.   Inadequate interactions between individuals prevent them from management their conflict constructively.[36]

Techniques of intervention in interpersonal conflict are closely related to these assumptions and include perceptual, informational and interactional procedures. Perceptual procedures involve (1) identifying conflict issues, (2) defining alternative issues, and (3) "reality-testing". Informational procedures involve (1) clarifying issues, (2) encouraging and gathering information (through interviews, meetings or other instruments), and (3) increasing frequency, openness and accuracy of communication. Interactional procedures entail (1) regulating the pace of interaction, (2) offering "process" observations to help individuals see how to be more effective, (3) injection inputs in the form of concepts, models or principles which might be useful in understanding a conflict and (4) helping in the design of implementation steps through which conflict resolution would be possible.[37]

Through his interventions a behavioural consultant becomes the information-gathering instrument and a "resource person". Administrators who are concerned about organizational change and more productive results would be well advised to be aware of the strengths — as well as

limitations — of this approach to interpersonal conflict management.

Managing Interdepartmental Conflict

Conflict between departments is a natural consequence of organizational activities. As organizations move towards greater differentiation and complexity, as they change or adapt to new circumstances, the stage is set for incompatibility of goals or competition for scarce resources. The resulting conflict between departments may have ambivalent consequences for an organization. On the one hand it may have a dysfunctional and counter-productive effect on the organization, and on the other hand it can be highly functional and stimulate intra-organizational creativity. For conflict to be a vehicle for organizational growth and creativity, there must exist an appropriate method of conflict management between departments. An administrator should know when he is faced with interdepartmental conflict and be informed of the processes for coping with it or resolving it.

Before exploring the methods and techniques for managing interdepartmental conflict, it is pertinent to examine briefly the attitudes and behaviours which characterize interdepartmental conflict. These can be described in terms of the following categories:

1.   Effects within each department. When departments are in conflict, individual members tend to bury their differences and display greater loyalty to their department. Departments become more cohesive, more formal in their behaviour and more insistent upon individual conformity and accomplishment of prescribed tasks.

2.   Effects between departments. Each department begins to experience perceptual distortions and to develop a strong self-image and a negative stereotype of the other. With the rise of prejudicial attitudes between departments there is an increase in hostility and a decrease in communication. Each department strives to enhance its own image and performance and to downgrade the other's. Under such conditions a conflict becomes a matter of victory or defeat, winning or losing.[38]

The fundamental significance of a win-lose dynamic is that it is, to some degree, intrinsic to any complex and stratified organization, but that feelings of in-group versus out-group are especially strong in conflict situations. The attitudinal characteristics of such a pattern include a competitive orientation, the evaluative characteristics include antagonistic feelings and the behavioural characteristics include circumscribed interaction and distorted communication. The structural attributes of a conflict relationship must be taken into account in proposing a strategy of conflict management.

Traditional approaches to managing interdepartmental conflict

emphasized such methods as (1) conflict avoidance (separating departments by relocating them physically), (2) regulating a conflict by introducing new rules and procedures, (3) seeking a form of "legalistic" solution (by appealing to higher organizational authorities), (3) using departmental representatives to reach a compromise agreement or (4) seeking mediation or arbitration from an outside body. Such conflict management methods may indeed produce an agreement. They may reduce the level of conflict behaviour between departments and even legitimize new levels of performance. They can not, though, achieve a genuine conflict resolution because they merely reflect, perpetuate and occasionally aggravate a win-lose pattern of interactions. Separation, withdrawal, institutionalization, bargaining or legal approaches are essentially forms of a win-lose confrontation. They all start with a polarized, adversary orientation, in which each department tries to attain as much as possible by outsmarting the other. They bury a conflict, ignore it, produce power-based decisions or allow departments to withdraw from it. They do not stimulate a search for conflict resolution.[39]

A range of new approaches to managing interdepartmental conflict may be suggested. These approaches acquire new significance because they become integral parts of an interaction process between departments, because they move away from win-lose type of strategies and because they can meet the need for conflict resolution more effectively. They are best summarized in terms of the social psychologists out of whose experiments these approaches evolved:

I.   Sherif et al.[40]

Sherif and his associates suggest two broad strategies which are designed to increase cooperation between departments, facilitate mutual communication of needs and minimize the effects of hostility and negative attitudes. Both strategies are broad in their scope. Their target of change is the organizational structure, but changes in individual attitudes and improvement in interpersonal competence may also be involved.

1.   **Locating a common enemy.** When departments are engaged in a conflict, their incentive structure (i.e. conflict of interest) may be changed and a mutual understanding as well as favourable attitudes may be promoted if they perceive a threat from a competing organization. Shifting the level of interdepartmental conflict to the higher level of inter-organizational conflict will produce a new structural relationship within each organization, a relationship that would harness departmental efforts and help them to compete more successfully against another organization.

The perception of an external threat or the identification of a common enemy supersedes any conflict that departments within an organization may have. As a strategy of conflict management within an

organization, it operates on two levels. First, it affects individual attitudes, perceptions and feelings of trust and distrust. Second, it influences organizational role structure. It transforms interactions which are characterized predominantly by differentiation to accommodative interactions of a collaborative and integrated orientation.[41]

2. **Locating a superordinate goal.** Superordinate goals are goals which are greatly desired by several departments and can only be achieved by combining the energies and resources of all involved. The introduction of a superordinate goal (e.g. developing a new product-line which would attract great customer demand) will create a cooperative context in which departments may interact on problems of joint interests, develop favourable attitudes and seek to achieve solutions that are mutually satisfactory. The introduction of a superordinate goal converts a conflict between departments to friendly interactions.[42]

The logic of introducing a superordinate goal is related to the very definition of a conflict. If conflict develops from the perception of incompatible goals, then cooperation would be promoted from common goals. To be successful in resolving interdepartmental conflict, a superordinate goal must be of such importance that departments can forget their differences and work together. It must involve several episodes taking into account the time dimension and it must be introduced by a third party.[43] The cumulative efforts of developing cooperative activities are an important determinant of successful conflict management between departments.

II.   Blake and Mouton[44]

Blake and Mouton accept that the most important aspect of a successful conflict management strategy is the attempt to shift the behavioural and attitudinal components of a relationship from a competitive to a cooperative orientation. They do, however, suggest that both the common enemy and the superordinate goal approaches fall short of the need to achieve a genuine conflict resolution. This is because both can be seen as (1) being mainly temporary in character, (2) both are primarily defensive and (3) both strategies may widen a conflict by externalizing it. They offer an approach which emphasizes consultation-based interventions, openness of communication, greater participation in decision-making and problem-solving interactions.

Blake and Mouton accept that traditional conflict management strategies can only deal with the behavioural component in conflict and bring about a patchwork solution. They suggest an approach to conflict management which involves interventions by organizational consultants (usually applied behavioural scientists), who have no vested interest in the conflict itself, but who have the competence and experience to generate a

productive mode of conflict management. They avoid the pitfalls of adjudicating or evaluating which department is "right" or "wong" (so often the hallmark of traditional conflict management). Nor do they seek to impose a solution. They intervene in order to generate creative thinking and to establish a problem-solving attitude.

Consultation-based approaches to interdepartmental conflict accept conflict situations as inevitable and see them as useful occasions which permit departments to disagree and to work out the disagreements and ultimately to understand each other better. The general functions of a consultant usually consist of (1) avoiding power-based outcomes, (2) providing knowledge and skills regarding conflict processes, (3) inducing an emotional-cognitive change as a prelude to collaborative interactions and (4) providing a supportive, informal and learning environment well-suited to creating the requirements conducive to problem-solving. The technologies of consultation consist of educational activities and techniques, laboratory training observations, survey-feedbacks, questionnaires and interviews. The structure of consultation activities is so designed as to engage individuals as whole persons, not merely as segmented individuals striving to cope with their role demands.[45]

Conflict management — and indeed all forms of organizational behaviour — is determined by the interaction of (1) information, (2) skills, (3) values and (4) situation. Each of these factors acts as a precursor of some consultation-based activities. Behavioural consultants provide parties in conflict with more information and an understanding of the complexities of conflict interactions. They promote social interaction skills (which should be recognized as important as technical skills). They promote values of cooperation and help to create a situation in which people can interact freely and feel that they are as important to an organization as are its resources or products.

The sequence of consultation activities commences with upgrading individual skills and abilities, moves on to team-building activities and then to restructuring intergroup and interdepartmental activities. The institutionalization of these activities consists of four steps. The first step — bringing in the consultant — represents an administrative response to a felt need for effective conflict management. The second step — entry — is associated with various information-giving activities. The third step is aimed at attitudinal change through data-feedback, team-training, sensitivity and T-Group training or Grid development. The final step involves a structural change in the relationship between departments and a move towards integrative interactions and conflict resolution.

Effective conflict management is quite a major undertaking. There are not too many guideposts to indicate where we are or how to move to-

wards conflict resolution. It is, therefore, a task which demands attention to attitudinal and behavioural elements, to outcome and emotional needs and to interpersonal as well as interdepartmental requirements. The intervention strategies of a behavioural consultant can, we have argued, move us towards that direction. We can not be certain that the intended effects will always be achieved. We can suggest, with some certainty, that such interventions move us forward in the direction of effective conflict management and success in problem-solving. With this consideration in mind, administrators should encourage such interventions and help to produce more effective programmes.

Conclusion

Organizations are social entities segmented into hierarchies of departments and individuals. The basic realities of organizational life can not but stimulate comparisons, competitions and conflicts between departments and individuals. Conflict is an omnipresent feature at each of these organizational levels. Since conflict may have functional as well as dysfunctional consequences, it is essential that administrators explore various methods and techniques of conflict management. Effective conflict management is indispensable if coordinated efforts and productive achievements are to result. I have suggested above that the planned intervention by behavioural scientists represents the most effective method since it can produce organizational change and a sense of personal accomplishment.
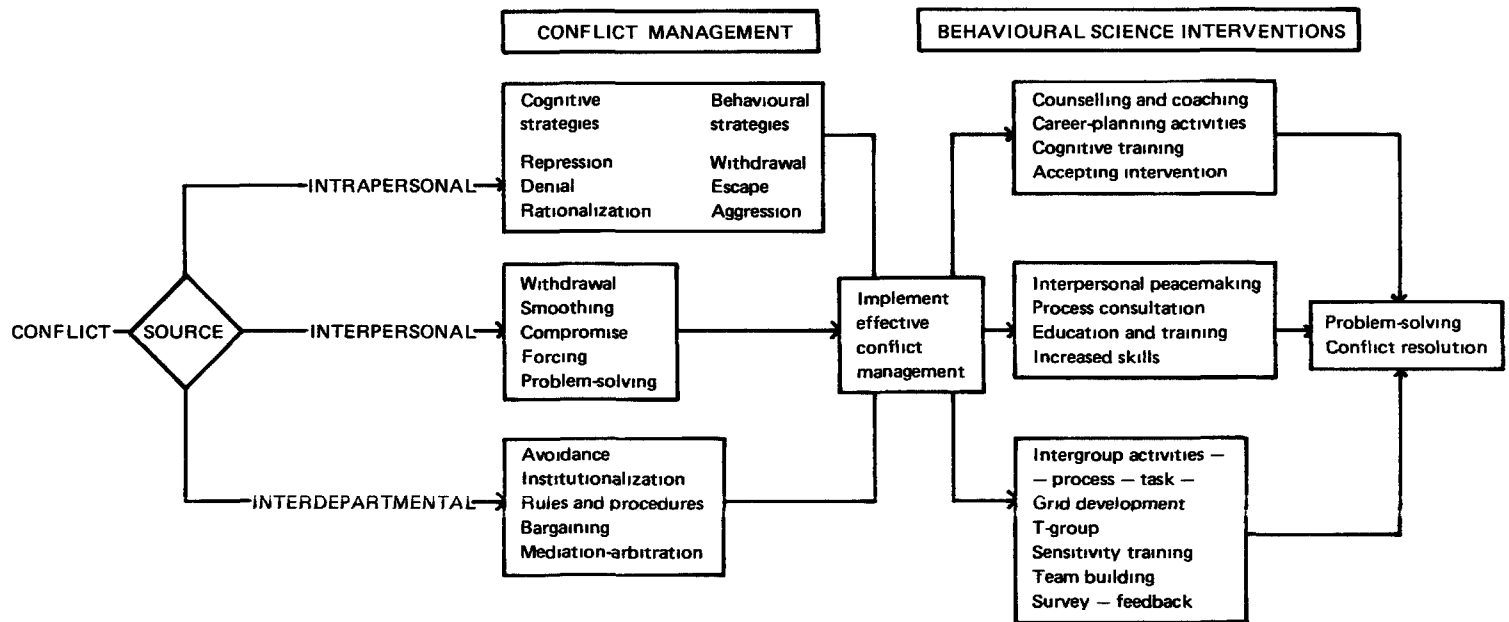
A wide range of intervention activities may be utilized to deal with conflicts at various organizational levels. It is beyond the scope of this article to provide a manual that can possibly foresee all the contingencies or to evaluate the effectiveness of different types of intervention.[46] This article purported to view conflict management as an integral part of the administrative process. Administrators should be able to ascertain the presence of a conflict, its basic sources, the level at which it manifests itself, its degree of intensity and the ways of furthering the objectives of conflict resolution. From a pragmatic viewpoint administrators should direct their attention to four issues: Is there a conflict? Where is the conflict? Does it require to be managed? How best to implement an effective conflict management strategy? With these issues in mind, the main features of this article may be summarized by developing a conceptual framework for conflict management in organizations.

Conflict and conflict in organizations has only recently begun to receive the attention it deserves. In this article I have sought to address ourselves to the two most important issues in this field, namely, the determinants of conflict and the effectiveness of different methods of conflict

Figure 1

A Framework for Organizational Conflict Management

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT	BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE INTERVENTIONS

INTRAPERSONAL

Cognitive strategies   Behavioural strategies

Repression   Withdrawal
Denial   Escape
Rationalization   Aggression

Counselling and coaching
Career-planning activities
Cognitive training
Accepting intervention

CONFLICT — SOURCE — INTERPERSONAL

Withdrawal
Smoothing
Compromise
Forcing
Problem-solving

Implement effective conflict management

Interpersonal peacemaking
Process consultation
Education and training
Increased skills

Problem-solving
Conflict resolution

INTERDEPARTMENTAL

Avoidance
Institutionalization
Rules and procedures
Bargaining
Mediation-arbitration

Intergroup activities —
— process — task —
Grid development
T-group
Sensitivity training
Team building
Survey — feedback

management. Working from a conceptual basis this article represents only an initial step in the direction of systemizing our understanding of conflict and conflict management. Our task lies in stimulating a more thorough analysis to fill the gap between our knowledge and the realities of organizational life. The administrators' task lies in accepting conflict evaluation as part of their role and in developing the creative abilities that are necessary to deal with it.

NOTES

1. See, for instance, K. Singer, "The Meaning of Conflict", *Australian Journal of Philosophy*, 27 (3, 1949), 141-157.

2. This is the approach adopted in J. Kelly, *Organizational Behaviour*. (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1969).

3. For the support of this conception, see: R.W. Mack, "The Components of Social Conflict", *Social Problems*, 12 (4, 1965), 388-397.

4. Cf. M. Deutsch, *The Resolution of Conflict*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973) and C.R. Mitchell, *The Structure of International Conflict* (London: Macmillan, 1981).

5. C.F. Fink, "Some Conceptual Difficulties in the Theory of Social Conflict", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 12 (4, 1968), 412-460.

6. R.L. Pondy, "Organizational Conflict: Concepts and Models", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 12 (2, 1967), 296-320.

7. This is adapted from J. Galtung, "Conflict as a Way of Life" in *Progress in Mental Health*, ed. by H. Freeman (London: Churchill, 1969) and elaborated in Mitchell, *op. cit.*

8. This view is supported by S.M. Schmidt and T.A. Kochan, "Conflict: Towards Conceptual Clarity", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 17 (3, 1972), 359-370.

9. On this conception of organization see: D. Katz and R.L. Kahn, *The Social Psychology of Organizations* (2nd ed.; New York: Wiley, 1976) and K.E. Boulding, "Organizations and Conflict", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 1 (2, 1957), 122-134.

10. This is the distinction between "conflicts of interest" and "conflicts of value". See: V. Aubert, "Competition and Dissensus", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 7 (1, 1963), 26-42.

11. On the distinction between destructive and constructive conflicts see: M. Deutsch, "Conflicts: Productive and Destructive", *Journal of Social Issues*, 25 (1, 1969), 7-42.

12. L. Rico "Organizational Conflict: A Framework for Reappraisal", *Industrial Management Review*, 5 (Fall, 1964), 67.

13. On the constructive or desirable features of organizational conflict, see: H. Assael, "Constructive Role of Interorganizational Conflict", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 14 (4, 1969), 499-505; J. Kelly, "Make Conflict Work for You", *Harvard Business Review*, 48 (July-August, 1970), 103-113; and J.A. Litterer, "Conflict in Organization: A Re-examination", *Academy of Management Journal*, 9 (September, 1966), 178-186.

14. In a recent survey administrators note that they spend at least 20 per cent of their time dealing with conflict and that their ability to manage it has become crucial. See: K.W. Thomas and W.H. Schmidt, "A Survey of Managerial Interests with Respect to Conflict", *Academy of Management Journal*, 19 (2, 1976), 315-318. But Cf. C.B. Handy *Understanding Organizations*. (Harmondsworth, Middx.: Penguin, 1976).

15. D. Katz, "Approaches to Managing Conflict", in *Power and Conflict in Organizations*, ed. by R.L. Kahn and K.E. Boulding (New York: Basic Books, 1964), pp. 105-114. See also: J.D. Thompson, "Organizational Management of Conflict", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 4 (4, 1960), 389-409.

16. S.P. Robbins, *Managing Organizational Conflict: A Non-Traditional Approach* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974).

17. For an extended discussion of these units of analysis as actors in conflict, see: K.E. Boulding, *Conflict and Defense: A General Theory* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962).

18. For a fuller account of intrapersonal conflict see: J.S. Brown, "Principles of Intrapersonal Conflict", *Journal of Conflict Resolution,* 1 (2, 1967), 135-154 and R.N. Sanford, "Individual Conflict and Organizational Interaction" in *Power and Conflict in Organizations,* ed. by Kahn and Boulding, pp. 95-104.

19. One might also note that certain personal variables (for example dogmatism, authoritarian, low-esteem) are major conflict sources.

20. Dutton and Walton found that conflict increases when departments depend upon common but scarce resources. See: J.M. Dutton and R.E. Walton, "Interdepartmental Conflict and Co-operation: Two Contrasting Studies", *Human Organization,* 25 (2, 1966), 207-220.

21. On the relationship between contextual factors and interdepartmental conflict, see: R.E. Walton and J.M. Dutton, "The Management of Interdepartmental Conflict: A Model and Review", *Administrative Science Quarterly,* 14 (1, 1969), 73-84; R.E.. Walton, R.E. *et al.* "Organizational Context and Interdepartmental Conflict", *Administrative Science Quarterly, 14 (4, 1969), 522-542;* and R.G. Corwin, "Patterns of Organizational Conflict", *Administrative Science Quarterly,* 14 (4, 1969), 507-520.

22. See: Boulding, "Organizations and Conflict" and L. Kriesberg, *The Sociology of Social Conflict* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1973).

23. Janis and Mann find that intervention techniques are much more successful at resolving intrapersonal conflict than other techniques. See: I.L. Janis and L. Mann, *Decision Making* (New York: The Free Press, 1977).

24. On the basic idea of intervention in intrapersonal conflict, see: C.H. Patterson, *Relationship Counselling and Psychotherapy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974); J.J. Pietrofessa, *et al. Counselling: Theory, Research and Practice* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1978); and K.C. Ferguson, "Concerning the Nature of Human Systems and the Consultant's Role," *Journal of Applied Behavioural Science,* 4 (2, 1968), 179-193.

25. Steele suggests nine roles (they are not mutually exclusive). See: F. Steele, *Consultation for Organizational Change* (Amherst, Mass.: The University Press, 1975).

26. On techniques of intervention, see: C. Argyris, *Intervention Theory and Method* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1970); B. Shertzer and S.C. Stone, *Fundamentals of Counselling* (3rd ed.: Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1980). See also: C. Argyris, "Exploration in Consultant-Client Relationships", *Human Organization,* 20 (2, 1961), 121-133; M.I. Gould, "Counselling for Self Development", *Personnel Journal,* 49 (3, 1970), 226-234; and F. Steel, "Consultants and Detectives", *Journal of Applied and Behavioural Science,* 5 (2, 1969), 187-202.

27. See: M. Argyle, *The Psychology of Interpersonal Behaviour* (2nd ed.; Harmondsworth, Middx.: Penguin, 1972).

28. See: J.G. Holmes and D.T. Miller, "Interpersonal Conflict" in *Contemporary Topics in Social Psychology,* ed. by J.W. Thibaut *et al.* (Morristown, N.J.: General Learning Press, 1976), pp. 265-308.

29. See: R.R. Blake, and J.S. Mouton, *The Managerial Grid* (Houston: Gulf Publishing Co., 1964) and R.R. Blake, J.S. Mouton and H.A. Shepard, *Managing Intergroup Conflict in Industry* (Houston: Gulf Publishing Co., 1964).

30. For a discussion of these features, see: N.R.F. Maier, *Problem-Solving and Creativity in Individuals and Groups* (Belmont, Calif.: Brooks/Cole, 1970).

31. P.R. Lawrence and J.W. Lorsch, "Differentiation and Integration in Complex Organizations", *Administrative Science Quarterly,* 12 (1, 1967), 1-47.

32. R.J. Burke, "Methods of Managing Superior-Subordinate Conflict", *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science,* 2 (2, 1970), 124-135.

33. R.J. Burke, "Methods of Resolving Interpersonal Conflict", *Personnel Administration,* 32 (4, 1969), 48-55.

34. See: A.C. Filley, *Interpersonal Conflict Resolution* (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman, 1975); R.R. Blake and J.S. Mouton, "The Fifth Achievement", *Journal of Applied Behavioural Science*, 6 (4, 1970), 413-426 and D.E. Zand, "Trust and Managerial Problem-Solving", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 17 (2, 1972), 229-239.

35. Walton reports on a number of successful interventions along these lines. See: R.E. Walton, *Interpersonal Peacemaking* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1969) and R.E. Walton, "Interpersonal Confrontations and Basic Third Party Functions", *Journal of Applied Behavioural Science*, 4 (3, 1968), 327-345.

36. For a more detailed discussion, see: R.J. Fisher, R.J. "Third Party Consultation: A Method for the Study and Resolutions of Conflict", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 16 (1, 1972), 67-94.

37. Schein divides these procedures into task and maintenance activities. See: E.H. Schein, *Process Consultation* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1969).

38. These problems were systematically studied in M. Sherif *et al. Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation* (Norman, OKI: University Book Exchange, 1961); M. Sherif and C.W. Sherif, *Social Psychology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969); M. Sherif, "Experiments on Group Conflict and Cooperation", in *Readings on Managerial Psychology*, ed. by H.J. Leavitt and R.L. Pondy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), pp. 408-421; R.R. Blake and J.S. Mouton, "The Intergroup Dynamics of Win-Lose Conflict and Problem-Solving Collaboration in Union-Management Relations", in *Intergroup Relations and Leadership*, ed. by M. Sherif (New York: John Wiley, 1962), pp. 94-142 and M. Deutsch, *The Resolution of Conflict*.

39. On the impact of these procedures see: R. Likert and J.G. Likert, *New Ways of Managing Conflict* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976).

40. See: M. Sherif, *Group Conflict and Cooperation: Their Special Psychology* (London: Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1967); M. Sherif and M.D. Wilson, eds., *Group Relations at the Crossroads* (New York: Harper, 1953) and the Sherif work referred to above.

41. Stern *et al.* report on attitudinal and behavioural changes engendered by an external threat, see: L.W. Stern, *et al.* "Managing Conflict in Distribution Channels: A Laboratory Study", *Journal of Marketing Research*, 10 (2, 1973), 169-179 and L.W. Stern, *et al.*, "Strategies for Managing Inter-organizational Conflict: A Laboratory Paradigm", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 60 (4, 1975), 472-482.

42. See: M. Sherif, "Superordinate Goals in the Resolution of Intergroup Conflict", *American Journal of Sociology*, 63 (4, 1958), 349-358.

43. See the evidence offered in D.W. Johnson and R. Lewicki, "The Initiation of Superordinate Goals", *Journal of Applied Behavioural Science*, 5 (1, 1969), 9-24.

44. See: R.R. Blake and J.S. Mouton, "Intergroup Therapy", *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 8 (3, 1962), 196-198; R.R. Blake and J.S. Mouton, "Union-Management Relations: From Conflict to Collaboration", *Personnel*, 38 (June, 1961), 38-51; R.R. Blake and J.S. Mouton, and R.L. Sloma, "The Union Management Intergroup Laboratory: Strategy for Resolving Intergroup Conflict", *Journal of Applied Behavioural Science*, 1 (1, 1965), 25-57; R.R. Blake, and J.S. Mouton, "Intergroup Problem-Solving in Organizations" in W.G. Austin and S. Worchel, eds., *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (Monterey, Calif.: Brooks/Cole, 1979), pp. 19-32; and the work of Blake and Mouton referred to earlier.

45. For a detailed discussion of characteristics, functions, activities and types of intervention, see: W.L. French and C.H. Bell, *Organization Development: Behavioural Science Interventions for Organizational Improvement* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973). See also: R.R. Blake and J.S. Mouton, *Consultation* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1976).

46. For such an attempt see: D.G. Bowers, "OD Techniques and their Results in 23 Organizations", *Journal of Applied Behavioural Science*, 9 (1, 1973), 21-43 and J.I. Porras, "The Comparative Impact of Different OD Techniques and Intervention Intensities", *Journal of Applied Behavioural Science*, 15 (2, 1979), 156-178. See also: R.R. Blake and J.S. Mouton, "Group and Organizational Team Building: A Theoretical Model for Intervening", in *Theories of Group Processes* ed. by C.L. Cooper (London: John Wiley, 1975), pp. 103-129.