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DEVELOPMENT OF MULTIPLE VALUE ORIENTATIONS IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION BEHAVIOR: AN EXPERIENTTAL TEACHING PARADIGM IN LABOR-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS COURSE

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ABSTRACT

The teaching of conflict management requires attention to two major aspects. First, the type of classroom climate necessary for optimal development of participants' cognitive and behavioral skills in the context of conflict. Second, the value orientations that are to be operationalized in the conflict resolution process. This longitudinal study focuses on these two aspects of conflict resolution style development and concludes that experiential teaching design within the framework of multiple-value oriented conflict resolution behavior is a necessary condition for optimal learning.

INTRODUCTTON

The teaching learning processes traditionally employed in the arena of conflict and conflict management have been less than adequate primarily because of the paucity of appropriate conceptual schemes. The limited definitional perspectives and conceptual frameworks led to monolithic conflict reducing processes and structures that seem to have been rigidly applied to varying conflict events and conditions. Classroom activities focused on developing conflict handling skills and behaviors have operated from such limited foundations.

Of late, the developments in the field of experiential learning, because of its implicit and explicit behavioral flexibilities, seem to offer hope as well as the impetus to impart complex cognitive and behavioral skills to students of organizations.

This paper attempts to synthesize the essence of appropriate teaching/learning process within an experiential framework that attempts to elicit optimal conflict resolution responses of students and report on the results obtained within a research paradigm. The results reported in this paper are based on a longitudinal research conducted over two semesters in which the teaching methodologies were sequentially changed from content-oriented to experiential. The effectiveness of content-oriented teaching methods in bringing about desirable conflict resolving responses in students participating in simulated conflict situations in the context of union-management relations class has been reported in another paper (1). A comparison of those changes with the changes in conflict-resolving behaviors among students participating in another union- management relations class designed primarily along experiential mode and the implications of these perceived changes for better teaching designs are the major themes of this paper.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Conflicts often tend to be ambiguous. The primary task of defining the conflict is, therefore, focus. Recently a number of academic discussions have been focused on the apparent disorganized state of organizational conflict literature with concomitant divergent definitions of conflict, different sets of explanatory variables, and the resultant diverse strategy recommendations for resolving these conflicts (14, 17).

One way of classifying conflict, in the opinion of Druckman, et. al. (8), would be to perceive situations as either conflicts of interests or conflicts of values. Conflict of interest between two parties is defined as a discrepancy between their preferences for the distribution of a scarce resource. The conflict is caused by differing utilities for the range of possible outcomes, different expected payoffs for the same outcome, or different vested interests of non-overlapping constituencies in the various possible outcomes. The parties become contestants when both are strongly motivated to achieve their most desired outcome under conditions that permit only one to be realized. It is the prototype for experimental studies of coordination using matrix games or bargaining simulations.

An alternative conceptualization of interparty conflict is that proposed by Hammond and his associates (12). These investigators have conducted a number of experiments designed to explore the determinants of the resolution of <u>cognitive conflicts</u> or conflicts caused by different ideas, values, ideologies, policies and so on. This type of conflict is defined operationally by differences in the probabilistic relationship between cues or predictors and a criterion that represents the solution to a shared problem. The parties disagree over the best way to achieve a particular outcome rather than over what that particular outcome should be. The conflict is likely to be most intense when (a) there are several possible strategies leading to the same outcome and (b) the criterion is somewhat ambiguous. Under these conditions, cognitive conflicts are rather difficult to resolve without appropriate mediational devices.

Another classification scheme for understanding the causal attributions of conflict is apparent in the Killman and Thomas paradigm (13). In this scheme, two specific attributional distinctions are utilized for understanding conflict. The first distinction is along process vs. structural dimension and the second distinction is along the internal vs. external sources of influence. These two critical distinctions are then logically combined by these authors to identify four perspectives of conflict. This is exhibited in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1
THE TWO DISTINCTIONS WHICH DEFINE THE FOUR PERSPECTIVES, WITH SOME EXAMPLES OF KEY
DIAGNOSTIC VARIABLES AND THE FOUR BROAD INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

Source: Killman, Ralph H., and Kenneth W. Thomas, "Four Perspectives On Conflict Management: An Attributional Framework for Organizing Descriptive and Normative Theory," The Academy of Management Review, Vol. 3 No. 1 (January, 1978), 59.68.

In view of the conceptual schemes, as described above, it is possible to integrate and develop a complex scheme for perceiving the conflict process. Such an integrated model of conflict, exhibited in Figure 2, would be more congruent with the realities of actual conflict process.

FIGURE 2
A THREE DIMENSIONAL MODEL OF CONFLICT
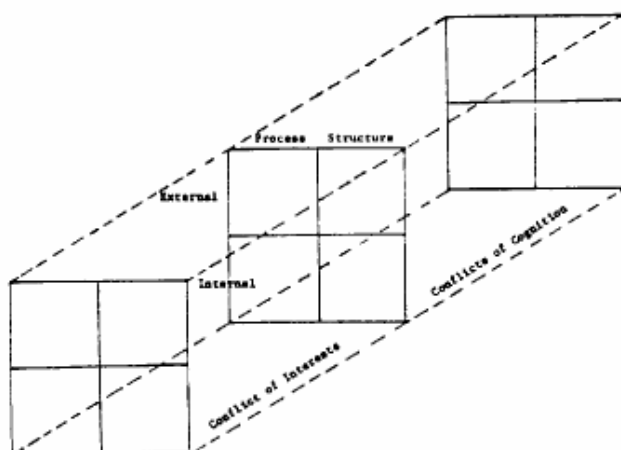
Multiple versus Single Value Orientation

Rapidly expanding awareness among the scholars and practitioners of management about the nature and influences *of* values in complex organizational processes has resulted in a surfeit of dialogues, mostly in the form of conceptual articles in journals. A significant line of discussion seems to be focused on the issue whether the organizations are value-neutral in their approach to problem solving. If the organizational processes are, indeed, value-oriented, the argument continues, then one of the most important dimensions of management education must be the question of student exposure to the single versus multi-valued orientation towards organizational decision making. Few of the recent discussions seem to indicate a preference for teaching multi-value approaches to problem solving. The dialogues are expected to continue for some time to come. But the next phase of this debate must, of necessity, be staged amidst data collected through empirical research. The data from such research would help us obtain a better perspective of the dynamic interplay of values in the open system model of an organization. In the meantime, it would be most beneficial if research designs are generated for partial analyses of value influences in specific organizational processes.

The conflict management would be one such area where the value interplay can be observed, isolated and measured with certain degree of precision. The data collected through research in this area would be timely and appropriate in resolving the single versus multi-valued approach to value issues.

Deutsch (6) attributed cause of any conflict to differences in values, beliefs, desires, interests and scarce resources between individuals. Sanford (16) saw the cause of conflict to be embedded in the complex chemistry of personality variables of which value happens to be an important dimension.

Conflict, when cast in these frames, appears to be a complex process that would require complex strategies for effective resolution. These complex strategies would, in turn, appear to have an underpinning of multiple value oriented behaviors that would be situation specific. In the Blake and Mouton model of conflict resolution behavior, we find five specific approaches, each being a manifestation of an alternative value system, all of which are esteemed to various degrees in our culture (5). Myrdal (15) has indicated that individual value systems contain apparently contradictory subsystems which can be activated by different situations. These subsystem value orientations have potentialities for specific behavior patterns that are perceived as valuable skills when evoked by specific situations in which such skills are considered to be appropriate. This has tremendous significance for the development of conflict management skills through experiential methods.

On the other hand, Blake and Mouton (4) clearly indicate a preference for the development of a single value orientation toward conflict management--that of the collaborative orientation. According to the authors, the collaborative approach is the fifth achievement "in the establishment of a problem solving society where differences among men are subject to resolution through insights that permit protagonists themselves to identify and implement solutions to their differences upon the basis of committed agreements.. .Success in mastering this achievement will undoubtedly require recognition of the classroom in ways that permit the study of conflict as a set of concepts and the giving and receiving of feedback in ways that enable men to see how to strengthen their own capacities and skills for coping with it directly" (4). Deutsch (7) also believes it's important to bring conflict out in the open and suggests that avoiding the problem solving implicit in attempting to openly reduce conflict helps to facilitate poor decision making. With normative statements such as the above, it is not surprising to discover an overwhelming emphasis among behaviorists to emphasize collaborative/problem solving conflict management style when they teach conflict resolution through either cognitive or experiential methods.

Content vs. Experientially Oriented Pedagogies

Teaching conflict management to students means that the classroom becomes part of the external environment of the conflict process. In this study, the classroom was one in union-management relations and it was the intention of the authors to facilitate student understanding of effective modes *of* resolving conflict, both conflict of interests and cognitive conflict.

Whether the conflict situation is effectively resolved or managed depends an the behavior of the participants. According to Blake and Mouton (5), and Hall (11), conflict-oriented behavior varies along two major dimensions. The first is concern with personal objectives; some believe that winning is the most important goal in conflict, while others are less concerned about winning. The second dimension is concern with relationship; some attach great importance to the well being and durability of the relationship experiencing conflict, while others may feel the relationship is less important.

To Blake and Mouton (5) and Hall (11), there are five possible ways to deal with conflict. The first is to collaborate. This is considered the most effective of the five possible behaviors. To collaborate means to maximize on both of the above mentioned dimensions, that is, have maximum concern with relationship development and personal goal accomplishment. The other four are to compete or be concerned with obtaining personal goals at the expense of the relationship; to cooperate or yield or maximize attention to the relationship and not at all to winning, to compromise, or merely satisfied on both the relationship and personal goals dimensions without maximizing on either and to withdraw, which is to avoid all aspects of the conflict situation, and not pay any attention to either personal goals or relationships. If one withdraws, one is minimizing on both behavioral dimensions and obtains none of what can be gained from the conflict situation.

In the focal courses to this study, it was stressed that if conditions permit, an open, problem-solving collaborative style was the most feasible. However, as the model depicted in Figure 2 suggests, sources external to the conflict may influence how the conflict proceeds. For this study, these external sources are elements of the classroom situation and two of these elements seem to facilitate conflict management behaviors other than collaboration. The first is the authoritarian structure of the classroom, and it encourages withdrawal behavior. According to Frank (10), the classroom structure, with its entry requirements and limits on spontaneity, facilitate general psychological withdrawal on the part of the student. In a simulated conflict situation, if a person is leaning towards withdrawal as a dominant conflict resolution style, then the classroom environment may reinforce that style and influence the person to a greater likelihood of withdrawing as a way of coping with conflict. Therefore, it is possible that, even though one of the goals of the course is to help students became more collaborative in dealing with conflict, the classroom atmosphere pulls them in an opposite direction, towards withdrawal. The second aspect of the field is the nature of the relations between the parties to the conflict. As previously mentioned, the course deals with union-management relations. The conflict implicit in these relations ordinarily is resolved by distributive bargaining and parties usually assume win-lose conditions in union-management relations. Then, it would be expected that students who study win-lose union-management conflict situations would be more comfortable with conflict coping behaviors which are appropriate for those kinds of situations and the kind of behavior which is the most appropriate is

competitive behavior which maximizes personal goals. So, even though the goals of the course are to facilitate collaboration, the course content may encourage competition.

However, not all classrooms are the same, and the degree to which competition and withdrawal are facilitated may vary with the type of classroom. The purpose of this study then was to compare the effects of a content dominated, teacher centered classroom with one experientially and less teacher based. This kind of comparison study is not new, but most (see 8) have compared the lecture approach with a discussion approach as to how well each attains cognitive goals. And, while there have been sortie research efforts which have compared content and experiential approaches to teaching (e.g. 2,3), none have done so in a union management course and few have looked at personality changes resulting from teaching a course with a particular method.

In this study it was expected that experiential and content-oriented classrooms would produce different conflict-related behavior patterns. More specifically, it was expected that more withdrawal behavior might emerge from a content-oriented class because it is more authoritarian and Frank (10) suggests that it is the authoritarian structure of classrooms that is responsible for the withdrawal behavior. Conversely, because it is less authoritarian, it was expected that less withdrawal behavior would occur in the experiential classroom. It was expected that different behaviors might emerge from classes with different content emphasis. More specifically, it was expected that a course which focused on conflict resolution in general would facilitate less competitive behavior than a course focusing solely on union-management relations. This would be due to the fact that general conflict resolution does not focus as much on win-lose as union- management relations does.

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

The subjects were 16 students enrolled in a union management course during the Spring of 1978 and 19 students who took a course with the same title in the Spring of 1979. All of the students were seniors in management or graduate students. Of the students in the 1978 class, three were women; of the students in the 1979 class, six were females.

Course Design

The content of the course has been described elsewhere (1). Briefly, it utilized a traditional content-oriented pedagogy, laced with a small portion of experiential methodology. Host of the class time was devoted to lecturing. There were some case discussions, and one three-hour period was devoted to an experiential union-management bargaining session. In that session, participants bargained as pairs and received feedback in tens of how much each pair settled for vis-à-vis an average amount (thus implicitly designating winners and losers; e.g., if a pair settled for mare than the average, the union representative was the winner and the management representative the loser.)

The second class was different. Instead of one bargaining simulation, there were three, and only one involved union-management negotiations. Students were able to take a more active role in determining their behavior during bargaining sessions. Their pre-test conflict management scores were fed back to them and

they were given the opportunity to articulate how they wanted to change their conflict-related behavior. In addition, they were encouraged to try to change their behavior in accordance with their own goals. Students discussed their own views of the ideal kind of conflict-oriented behavior, instead of just listening to the professor's. This second course then, encouraged a more active student role and, although it was by no means entirely experiential, it was much more so than the first.

Procedure

In both classes, Conflict Management Style Inventory (CNSI) pre-tests were given in the second week of the class and CMSI post-tests were given the second to the last week of the semester. In both classes, bargaining simulations were administered in the last half of the term and conflict management style goal setting occurred near the middle of the experiential course.

Conflict Management Style Scores

This survey is designed to provide information about the relative manner in which individuals react to and attempt to manage conflict between themselves and others. It yields five scores, each representing a possible style for dealing with conflict. These five are: (1) withdrawal, (2) compromise, (3) compete, (4) cooperate, and (5) collaborate. The survey contains twelve items, each containing five possible alternatives, and, each of the alternatives represent one of the five styles. In filling out the survey, the respondent is to place each alternative on a ten-point scale, according to how characteristic the item is of his or her attitude or behavior. For example:

When a person whose affection and respect you value adopts a position or follows a course of action that is, in your opinion, intolerable and unreasonable and makes you quite unhappy, how do you handle the situation?

a.   I lay it on the line and tell the other party how I feel and what he's doing that I don't like.

b.   I bite by tongue and try to keep my misgivings to myself in the hope that he will discover the error of his ways without any interference from me.

c.   I call attention to the fact that we are apparently at odds; I try to describe haw I Interpret his position and how T am feeling about it so that we can begin to explore a mutually acceptable position.

d.   I try ta play it casual, letting him know in subtle ways that I am not pleased; I may get In a few licks through humor or I may cite the experiences of some common acquaintances, but I try to avoid a direct face-off.

e.   I let my actions speak for me; I may go into a shell or become depressed, and I very likely will try to convey my unhappiness by a moody silence or lack of interest during our encounters.

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Completely   : : : : : : : : : :   : Completely
Characteristic 10 9  8  7  6  5  4  3  2  1   Uncharacteristic
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With this format, if the subject thinks all five items are very characteristic of his or her behavior, then he or she can place all five near that end of the continuum. The five scores yielded in the survey are raw scores; for purposes of analyses, these scores are transformed into T or standard scores.

RESULTS

Tables 1 and 2 show the pre-post results for the more content-oriented and the more experientially-oriented classes, respectively. The only significant result was that withdrawal scores increased from the beginning of the semester to the end for the content-oriented class. There was virtually no difference between pre and past withdrawal scores for the experientially-oriented class. Although not significant, collaborative scores decreased over time for both classes and competitive scores increased over time for both classes.

Table 1

Comparison of Pre-Post Conflict Management Styles:
Content Orient Pedagogy

Conflict Style	Pre Mean	S. D.	Post Mean	S. D.		t	p
Collaborative	47.82	6.00	45.00	7.62	16	1.53	.166
Compromise	50.41	7.93	50.18	9.15	16	0.12	.906
Cooperative	54.47	12.82	54.84	8.51	16	-0.08	.940
Competitive	48.65	7.56	50.88	8.05	16	-1.38	.185
Withdrawal	51.53	10.53	55.94	7.97	16	-2.25	.037

Table 2

Comparison of Pre-Post Conflict Management Styles:
Experiential Oriented Pedagogy

Conflict Style	Pre Mean	S. D.	Post Mean	S. D.		t	p
Collaborative	51.32	9.38	50.47	9.69	19	0.56	.582
Compromise	54.16	8.19	53.79	5.80	19	0.16	.877
Cooperative	53.37	7.33	53.58	7.75	19	-0.09	.927
Competetive	48.37	7.68	50.10	7.14	19	-0.90	.379
Withdrawal	51.89	8.66	52.11	10.27	19	0.16	.873

These results support Frank's contention (10) that the authoritarian structure of classroom facilitates with- drawl behavior on the part of the students. In this study, in the more authoritarian content-oriented course, withdrawal scores increased with classroom exposure. However, when the instructor purposely attempted to moderate the authoritarian structure by increasing the number of experiential exercises, increasing the opportunities of spontaneity and allowing for a discussion of values, withdrawal scores did not increase.

Many of those who advocate experiential learning argue that one of the reasons to use it is that it is less likely to alienate students than the lecture approach. This study's result supports that contention. To the degree that the withdrawal dimension of the GIST is an indication of psychological withdrawal from a course, then the fact that withdrawal scores increased in the content oriented course and not in the experiential suggests that experiential classes prevent some of the alienation that occurs with more teacher-centered approaches.

DISCUSSION

In view of the conflict model presented earlier, it would appear that a simple cause-and-effect relationship between a unidimensional conflict resolution behavior (e.g. collaboration) and an optimal conflict Outcome would he difficult to achieve. The nature of the conflict itself is not fixed and, based on the perception of the participants, will vary from situation to situation. These varied perceptual-situational dynamics will, in turn, tend to trigger highly individualized responses from the participants

The results of this study definitely indicate benefits that can be obtained by designing a climate supportive of student involvement through appropriate experiential design. Under proper stimuli the withdrawal behavior of the students can be minimized. In the opinion of the authors, this is the minimum pre-condition for the achievement of successful conflict Intervention strategy.

Beyond this, the development, of a specific conflict resolution behavior, such as those postulated by Blake and Mouton, would require accurate assessment of a complex set of variables that may be utilized to design the specific series of experiences which in all situations lead to an optimal conflict outcome through the use of the specific conflict resolving behavior. However, in the absence of a carefully constructed design, the goal of developing a particular conflict resolving skill would, under normal circumstances, encounter failure. In the opinion of the authors, pursuit of the development of a single conflict resolving behavior is not worth the time and effort. A better goal would be to raise the consciousness of the students and make them aware of the complexities involved in identifying different categories of conflicts and provide them with relevant experiences in the multifaceted approaches to conflicts and conflict resolving behavior.

The results of the study further imply that the role of the teacher/facilitator is a critical one. The teacher/facilitator is the primary change agent whose objective is to influence the parties' perceptions, cognitions and emotions regarding the conflict experience. The teacher/facilitator needs to create a classroom climate within which the students encounter series of opportunities to become aware of their feelings and behaviors and the impacts these have on the outcome of the conflict. Also, the facilitator needs to provide guidance to the student participants enabling them to think through the consequences of alternative paths, and work through ambivalences about a course of action. The primary objective for the facilitator is to help the student focus on the important aspects of the conflict, be these process or structure, and to help improve the parties' internal processing of decisions regarding the conflict episodes. An experiential class is the most suitable design for achievement of these goals.

In this context, the question of values and the teacher's role in influencing students towards particular value orientation becomes paramount. The teaching/facilitating process will never be value free. What Is necessary is a basic value premise that will include a strong concern for the welfare and self-esteem of the student or trainee and a desire for students to act in accordance with their own skills, perceptions, and values" (18). In the oriental philosophies, the teacher has been described as the finger pointing the way to truth. The models of conflict imply the ineffectiveness of a-priori determined conflict resolving behavior and value orientations. Thus, it becomes the responsibility of the teacher to help the students get in touch with their own values and decision-making processes and apply the right combination to resolve the conflict. Only then the path would carry the traveler towards truth.

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