

LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

A STUDY ON UNDERSTANDING  
CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

A RESEARCH PROJECT  
SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF THE  
LEMI LEARNING CONTRACT

BY  
ROSENDO MARTINEZ  
LIEUTENANT

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY  
AUSTIN, TEXAS  
OCTOBER 1992



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## INTRODUCTION

In any kind of personal interactions it is inevitable that conflict will exist. As a decision maker one must understand conflict. This research was conducted primarily to get a better personal understanding of conflict management literature and how this literature can aid a supervisor in the police profession. It seems important to begin an examination of this subject by properly defining the term.

Conflict Management is a concept which has been around for a long time.<sup>1</sup> It includes all actions and mechanisms used by executives (or parties in conflict, or independent third parties) to keep personal and organizational disagreements from interfering with the achievement of enterprise objectives.

Conflict has numerous meanings and affects different individuals and situations. Conflict is said to exist between two or more individuals or work groups when they disagree on a significant issue or generally clash over the issues.<sup>2</sup> Conflict is inevitable whenever humans interact, either individually or in groups. Conflict is also defined as a struggle over values or claims to status, power, and scarce resources in which the aims of the conflicting

parties are not only to gain the desired values but to also neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals.<sup>3</sup>

Conflict is an important element of social interaction. When two or more persons or groups come into contact with one another, the relationship may become incompatible or inconsistent. Relationships may become inconsistent when two or more of the parties involved desire a similar resource that is in short supply or have partially exclusive behavioral preferences regarding their joint action, or have different attitudes, values, beliefs, and skills. Conflict exists whenever incompatible activities occur.

There is no single clear meaning for the term conflict. Because many scholars in different disciplines are interested in studying conflict the term conflict has a variety of connotations.<sup>4</sup>

#### FUNCTIONAL/DYSFUNCTIONAL CONFLICT

Social conflict can have both functional and dysfunctional consequences. Listed here are some functional and dysfunctional outcomes of conflict:

##### FUNCTIONAL OUTCOMES

- Better ideas are produced.

- People are forced to search for new approaches.
- Long standing problems are resolved.
- People are forced to clarify their ideas.
- The tension stimulates interest and creativity.
- Individual and group capabilities are tested.

#### DYSFUNCTIONAL OUTCOMES

- Some people feel defeated.
- Distance between people can be increased.
- A climate of distrust and suspicion can be developed.
- Where cooperation is needed there may be an introspective withdrawal.
- Resistance to teamwork can develop.
- People may leave because of turmoil.<sup>5</sup>

#### VIEWPOINTS

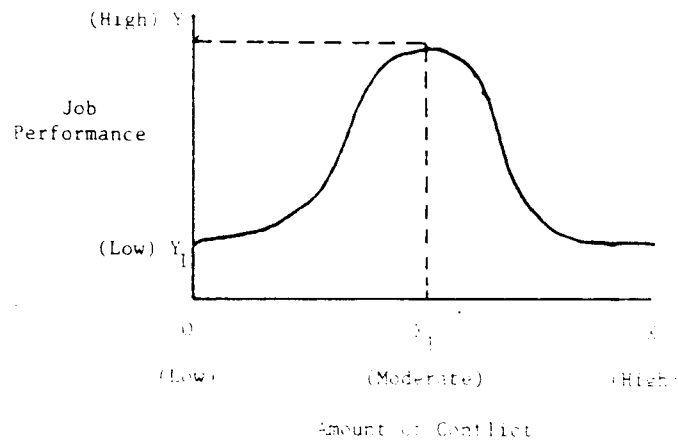
There are three viewpoints from which to view the history of conflict management. The first viewpoint is the classical view. Classical organizational theorists implicitly assumed that conflict was detrimental to organizations and, as a result, attempted to eliminate it by

designing mechanistic or bureaucratic organizational structures. A second viewpoint is the neoclassical view. Here human relation theorists also considered conflict to be negative, but they tried to eliminate it by improving the social system within the organization.

The third viewpoint could be considered a modern view. This viewpoint suggests that it is not necessarily negative or dysfunctional for organizations to have some conflict. This theory allows that a moderate amount of conflict handled in a constructive fashion is necessary for attaining an optimum level of organizational effectiveness.<sup>6</sup>

As a consequence, many now recognize that conflict within certain limits is essential to productivity. Little or no conflict in organizations may lead to stagnation, poor decision making and ineffectiveness. Therefore, it appears that the relationship between the amount of conflict and job performance approximates an inverted-U function. Figure 1 shows that a low level of job performance, (OY<sub>1</sub>), occurs when the amount of conflict is low, (O), or high, (X). With a moderate amount of conflict, (OX<sub>1</sub>), an optimum level of job performance, (OY), can be expected.<sup>7</sup>

Figure 1



## WHAT CAUSES CONFLICT?

### SOCIAL CONFLICT

There are numerous reasons why individuals end up in conflict situations. The following paragraphs examine several of these reasons as described by several authors.

Conflict is created when a social entity finds itself in an activity incongruent to its needs or interests, when behavioral preferences are incompatible to its preferences. Conflict also arises when resources are in short supply

leaving some not fully satisfied or when attitudes, values, skills and goals exist which are salient to it but exclusive to that of others.<sup>8</sup>

Conflict is sometimes caused by differences in group objectives. Management may choose to use funds for building repairs when the employees have requested a pay increase. The underlying factor here is who has more power. Also the difference between individual personalities can be a contributor to conflict. Many times the inability to communicate may cause conflict, or differences associated with job or organizational structure may contribute to it. An individual would not have such difficulties, whereas a large group with unclear policies or procedures may find it difficult to agree on issues because of their differing organizational or job related roles.<sup>9</sup>

Some other causes of conflict are limited resources-- "what you have is what I need"--or incompatible goals--"what you want is not what I want"--differing perceptions--"what you see is not what I see." In sum, these causes are common in most organizations.<sup>10</sup>



## POLITICS

Politics can also be the cause of conflict in organizations since most organizations function on the basis of systems of influence. Influencing factors might include authority, ideology, expertise and politics. The first three could be considered legitimate. Authority is based on power, ideology is based on beliefs and expertise is based on power that is certified. Politics represents power that could be illegitimate both in application and what it promotes. Political activity in an organization is usually divisive and conflictive. It is often the case that politics will result in having individuals or groups against legitimate systems of influence and also have the systems themselves eventually working against each other.<sup>11</sup>

In organizations that experience conflict one often finds that conflict is classified as a "political game." Here are thirteen such games as described by one author.

The first is insurgency games, one often played by the lower organizational members. These lower participants are those in the front line who deal directly with the mission of the organization. This group will often protect or rebel and

resist authority a condition that can be very frustrating for managers as well as those who attack the system from this perspective.

The second game is the counter insurgency game. This deals with persons with legitimate power who fight back with political means or legitimate means. The town mayor may legitimately reduce the funding of a project in the police department in order to remain in control.

The third political game could be termed a sponsorship game. In this case someone of lower status might be looking out for a supervisor in hopes that the supervisor will reward the person of lower status in some manner - normally an increase in position or power.

When the line supervisor or peers want to build a power base they might play the alliance-building game. Alliance-building is the fourth political game and includes recruiting and enlarging a power base. This is similar to the United States building a power base during the conflict with Iraq.

The fifth political game is the empire building game. This is similar to the alliance-building game although in this game there is usually a broader mix of superiors and subordinates.

The sixth political game is the budgeting game. It involves the same objectives as the previous games. However, this game deals with a resource and not power. The resources include items funded by an organizations budget (paper supplies, travel expenses, uniform items, vehicle maintenance repairs and so on). In the budget game the participants in control of the budget build their power base by control of resources, even though these participants may not have control of positions in a supervisory capacity.

The seventh political game is the expertise game. In this case expertise is used to build a power base. Persons will keep knowledge to themselves to have greater control. A person in a work force that may indirectly be involved could be a secretary. Secretaries have much needed knowledge that supervisors may need such as how to operate the computer to retrieve information. Without the secretary, the supervisor is not able to effectively function and is disadvantaged by the "expert."

The eighth political game is the lording game. This game is played to build a power base by "lording" legitimate power over those without it or with less of it. In this case legitimate power may be used in illigitimate ways. A manager

may lord formal authority over a subordinate or civil servant, or an expert may lord technical skills over an unskilled person.

The ninth political game is the line-versus-staff game. This game involves sibling-type rivalry. This is played to enhance personal power and to defeat a rival. An example is a line manager with decision-making authority who disregards the advise of staff advisers with specialized expertise for personal gain.

The tenth game is the rival camps game. The rival camps game is played to defeat a rival. This occurs when alliance-building games result in two major power blocs, giving rise to a two-person game in place of a one-person game. The conflict may be between the managers of traffic enforcement and criminal enforcement units within a department. The managers may dispute over the increase of personnel positions or the amount of funds distributed to their respective units.

The eleventh political game is the strategic candidates game. Often individuals or groups seek to promote, through political means, their own favored changes of strategic nature. This includes the plays of analysts, operating personnel, lower-level managers, even senior managers, who

promote their own candidates politically before they can do so formally. The strategic candidate game often combines the elements of the other games such as the empire-building, alliance-building, rival camps, line-verses-staff, expertise game and so on.

The twelfth political game is the whistle-blowing game. This game involves an insider with privileged information blowing the whistle to an influential outsider on some illegal behavior by the organization.<sup>12</sup> A recent article in the San Antonio Express News described a police officer who had been disciplined by the Police Department and later filed a whistle blower's lawsuit.<sup>13</sup> The police officer blew the whistle on officials to effect change in the police administration. This serves as a prime example of how conflict politics affects the real world.

The final game might be termed the young turks' game. The young turks' game is played for the highest stakes of all. This scheme is not to effect simple change or to resist legitimate power, but to overthrow it and institute major change. The "young turks" seek to reorient the organizations basic strategy, remove a major body of expertise, and rid the organization of its leadership. The objective is to replace

holders of authority while leaving the system intact.

Politics in an organization can cause wasted time and energy that could better be applied to improving organizational effectiveness. Politics can lead to higher costs and can cause an organization to change good procedures into procedures that are less effective. In sum, such changes can cause more harm than they do good. In the same context, politics can also correct deficiencies and lead to better working conditions. Overall, politics does, at times, benefit organizations when presented in an appropriate manner. If presented in a dysfunctional manner, however, it could destroy an organization or cause it to operate inefficiently.<sup>14</sup>

## STATUS

In some situations conflict is caused by status differences among groups. One example might involve psychologists, psychiatrists and social workers in the field of mental health. At one time, because of the training and education required of psychiatrists, they were considered to be above the other two groups. The other two groups accepted

this and considered their expertise as secondary. As the concepts of mental health changed, the quality and the level of education changed in each profession, and the groups' identities and relationships with each other changed. Social workers and psychologists pushed for total autonomy from the control of their psychiatric colleagues. The psychologists and social workers no longer felt that psychiatrists should be the recognized leader in the mental health field. They resisted and so did the psychiatrists. Psychiatrists resisted not being at the top of the mental health profession. Obviously this created status conflicts between those in these groups. The significance and effectiveness of those in the mental health profession depends greatly on the relationships between these three groups. They provide a service with their expertise, and, because of their desire to protect their status, the service they provide to patients may suffer, with the mental health profession in general paying the price.<sup>15</sup>

One can see that conflict can be disruptive and that status among groups is something some groups do not take lightly. In the same context, consider that without conflict the group with the highest status may continue to dominate.

By allowing or encouraging conflict it is possible to promote a balance among the groups. This again relates to the concepts of functional and dysfunctional conflict.

Functional conflict is good for organizations. Without conflict an organization can be harmed which can promote dysfunctional conflict. This in turn may drive the organization beyond legitimate disagreements and promote group stereotyping, sniping and sabotaging of individuals and units.<sup>16</sup>

#### GROUPS HISTORY

A group's history can cause conflict and impede cooperation. Unit history within the broader organization provides members continuity and stability. History allows group members to understand their origin and their destiny.

Even though such history can make positive contributions, it is often the cause of conflict. The history of a group can influence perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors. Various traditions and practices may keep individuals from being open when dealing with others. A person who develops or inherits traditions of suspicion,



distrust, and resentment will not react positively to another person or develop a relation based on trust, respect, openness, and mutual appreciation. These persons will not be positive or cooperative when confronted with a conflict situation. They will not be satisfied with the outcome of any given situation and can be destructive and undesirable.<sup>17</sup>

#### MANAGING CONFLICT

Among the various types of conflict could be conflict between organizations, conflict within an organization, and conflict within an individual. Basically, there are two kinds of organizational conflict, interpersonal and intergroup conflict. Interpersonal would exist between supervisors and subordinates while intergroup would involve two supervisors or two divisions.<sup>18</sup> In interpersonal conflict individuals can display their own attitudes, behaviors, and skills. When individuals deal with other individuals they may change their minds. A group member is not as free as someone acting alone. In an intergroup setting an individual

who departs from the groups attitudes, behaviors, or skills may well be rejected by the group.<sup>19</sup>

There are several ways to manage conflict. Conflict, as has been stated, can have positive or negative results. This section lists and examines different approaches for managing conflict.

The first approach is separation: if contact between the groups is minimized, then conflict will be minimized. For instance Officer Smith and Officer Jones are in conflict over Officer Jones smoking in the patrol car. The contact and conflict was minimized by the assignment of the two officers to separate shifts.

The second approach is affiliation: if the groups are united into one group, then the conflict will disappear. The patrol division and the police communication operators are in conflict over the response time of the operators to police officers radio calls. The patrol officers were temporarily assigned to work with the police communications operators to familiarize the officers with the duties and functions required of the operators. This affiliation created unity among the groups and eliminated the conflict.

The third approach is annihilation: if the groups are allowed to "go at it," the more powerful group will prevail

and the conflict will be settled. The group able to draw the most support will dominate over the other group.

The fourth approach is regulation: if management will impose strong sanctions and legal procedures for dealing with the conflict, then the groups are bound by managements regulations, eliminating or reducing the possibility of conflict.

The fifth approach is interaction: if groups are given the opportunity to discuss the conflict issue while maintaining the identity of each group, then the functional relationship between them is maintained. The key to the interaction approach is the opportunity to discuss conflicting issues. The interacting would be of a non-hostile nature in an office meeting or in a seminar.

Of the five approaches, the first four are less than optimal solutions. The fifth approach seems to be less destructive. It is more difficult for the manager to keep the groups from being aggressive or hostile when they are face-to-face. In such a situation, the ability of the manager to turn a win-lose situation into a win-win situation is a real challenge.<sup>20</sup>

It is surprising how limited the methods are that professionals use to deal with conflict. Some managers take

a firm position and then attempt to force it on others who often become adverse and end up fighting for their own positions. Some managers ignore conflict hoping it will disappear. Most managers pay insufficient attention to the process they use. They end up using methods that are ineffective, unfamiliar and uncomfortable, at times wasting human and financial resources.

All too often, managers will follow one or more ineffective approaches in handling conflict. Some of these approaches are avoiding the issue, leaping into battle and finding a quick fix.

Avoiding the issue results from the simple fact that conflict is unpleasant. Dealing with angry mail, irate telephone calls and hostile people is something few enjoy. As a result, it is easier to ignore conflict than to deal with its unpleasantness.

When an organization admits that conflict exists it is admitting that the unit or organization has failed. Often it is easier to pretend or imply that everything is all right and keep it from superiors hoping it will disappear. The bottom line in avoiding the issue is that it prolongs the conflict, which will often resurface in a more complicated form, making it more difficult to manage.

The "leaping into battle" approach rests on the idea that our society is used to having or being adversaries. Most people resent being placed in the middle of conflict, and tend to react negatively instead of taking time to contact the other parties involved to get additional information. They will draw a defensive plan including demanding meetings, letter writing, initiating litigation or demonstrations. This is caused by the lack of trust in others, (may stem from the group's history). People involved in a dispute will often mirror the behavior of their opponents.

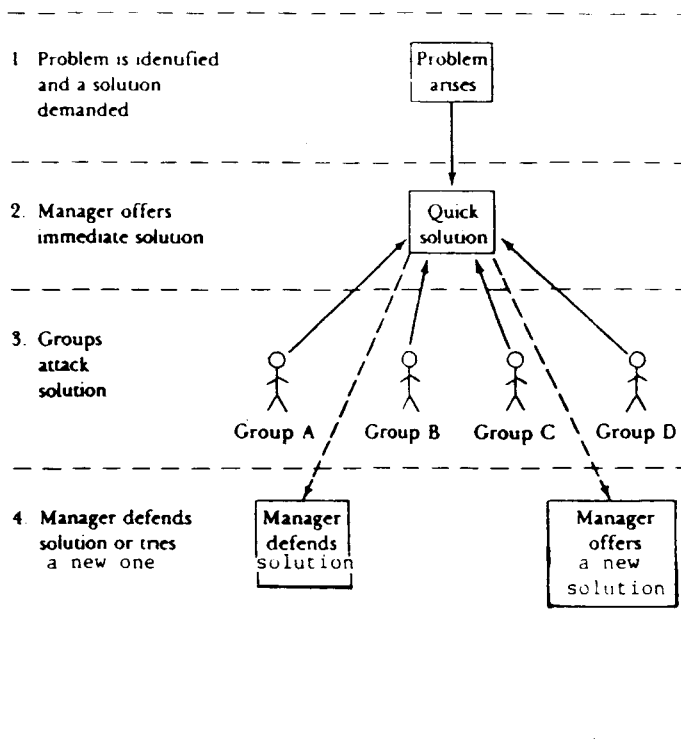
People may also choose to be adversarial because that's the way it has always been done. As a result, in many cases winning a conflict situation does not solve the problem. The victory causes animosities and makes the next confrontation more difficult to handle.

Laws or regulations are sometimes involved, but what is legally the proper thing to do is not always in the best interest of the parties involved. In choosing to litigate, the parties will limit their ability to exchange information and, as a result, give up the opportunity for a more satisfactory solution. Their resources are devoted to litigation rather than creating or finding a solution.

Another approach to managing conflict is the quick fix.

When the public is involved in a controversy there is always a great deal of pressure to rectify the problem quickly. When the pressure mounts, the manager must do something, and, unfortunately, this often ends up with the manager doing nothing. The manager will react without getting the facts or considering options. The results may be a faster-growing conflict. At this point, the manager should admit error, retreat, support actions or develop a new solution. Many managers often use the same ineffective solutions. (see figure 2)

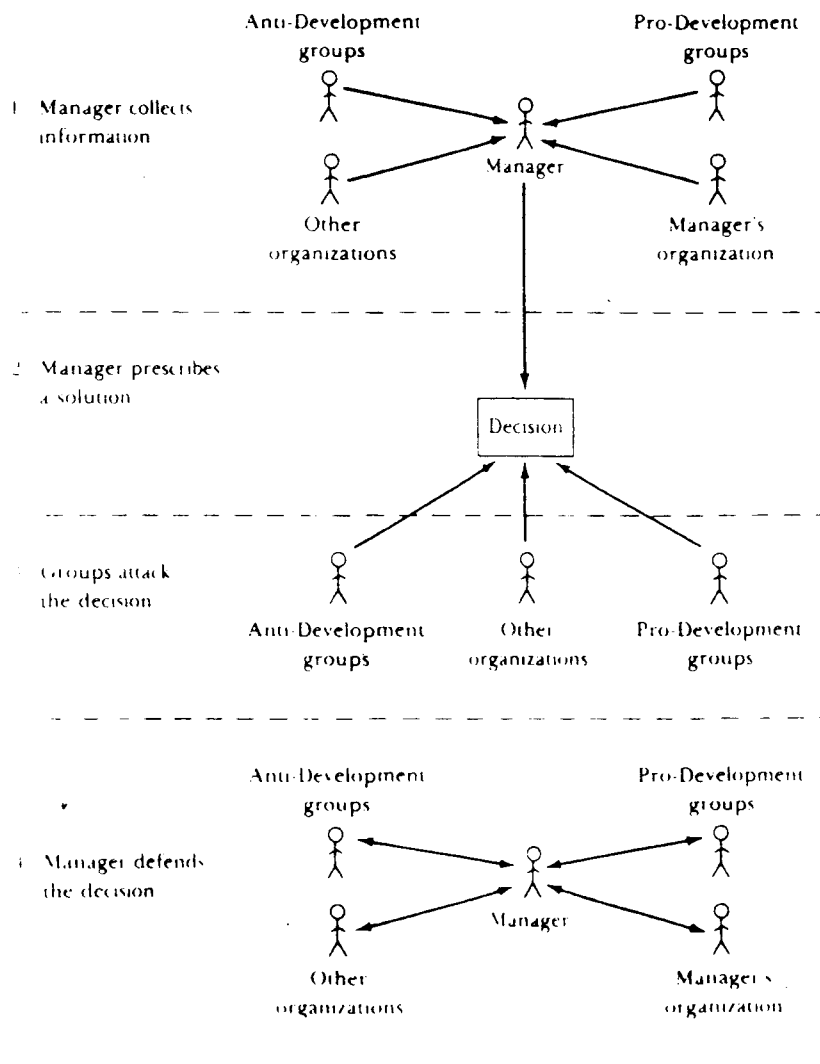
Figure 2 The Quick Fix



One other approach to managing conflict is the Solomon Trap. The Solomon Trap has four phases. In the first phase the person responsible for making a decision will identify all parties affected and will ask for their input. The person responsible for making the decision will usually be the manager. In the second phase managers will give consideration to all comments received, being fair and making sure to be within authority and agency goals. A decision will then be made. In the third phase, the decision is announced to all parties and the parties discover that their key issues were omitted. All parties lash out at the manager, stating that the decision is poor. The final phase involves the decision maker defending the decision. The parties involved are disappointed and angry and will not support the manager no matter what has been proposed. In the Solomon Trap the manager is the focal point for making a decision and then becomes the subject of attack from all sides. (see figure 3 on page 22).

In conclusion it is important that the manager be able to understand the process and the risk involved. Managers should know the various approaches to conflict resolution and also know when to use them appropriately.<sup>21</sup>

Figure 3 The Solomon Trap





## THE INTERFACE CONFLICT-SOLVING MODEL

Another approach to managing conflict is the use of conflict solving models. Blake and Mouton, in Solving Costly Organizational Conflict, refer to a conflict solving model. They also devote a chapter in the book to the use of this model to resolve a conflict situation at the Padreco Plant, an oil refining company headquartered in Houston. In the example they demonstrate how the model unfolds and what it takes for the model to work. The following are the six steps in the model and how they relate to the model.

In the first session objectives, activities, and procedures are considered. The first step in the model is to develop the optimum model. To do this, each participating group works separately to create a model of optimum interface applicable to their problems.

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"An interface is any point of contact between organizational groups at which interchanges are necessary to achieve a desired result. The points of contact are between departments, divisions, regions, and involve dynamics between groups rather than interpersonal relationships. Issues of organizational effectiveness that are present in

the interface contacts include information flow, coordination, arrangements, and decision making. Breakdown at organizational interfaces lead to mutual destructiveness. They result in poor decision making, lowered productivity or internecine warfare and ultimately reduced profitability".<sup>23</sup>

Keep in mind that the participants are key members of each group involved in the conflict and should be familiar with the history, current norms, and operating practices of their group. They must have the capability for making the decisions necessary to bring about change. Members must be committed and willing to take part in the activities.

In the Padreco Oil example, the participating groups were the operations and maintenance groups. These two groups had a history of poor cooperation and lack of coordination, which had been a barrier to greater efficiency and effective cost control.

The two groups agreed on the following elements which were specific to their problems and needs and which created a sound relationship between the two groups. This was their common ground: trust and respect, communication, planning, preparation of work orders, and training. Each group had their own statements describing each element.

In step two, the optimum relationship is consolidated. In this step a consolidated model of a sound relationship is then generated through the groups' joint efforts. The operations and maintenance groups then met and discussed the elements in a joint session to develop a model to which they could both agree.

Step three in the model is describing the actual relationship. In this step, actual conditions are described by each group separately, some members analyze factors that influenced the actual relationships. It is easier for the groups to identify the soundest relationship than it is to reach an agreement on actual conditions and identify misunderstandings and disagreements. The groups meeting separately have to voice assumptions and perceptions to point out how things actually are and convert this to how things might be.

In the fourth step the actual relationship is consolidated. The groups' individual thoughts are consolidated into a joint picture that will describe their present conflict. In the Padreco Oil Company, the operations and maintenance groups both agreed that trust and respect were lacking in their relationship. At this point in the

model both groups felt that progress had been made and reduced their defensiveness. The operations and maintenance groups were working now more as a team than as opposites.

The fifth step in the model is planning for change. Proposed changes are made in specific operational terms and are jointly agreed upon and described in detail. A plan for follow up is also established. The operations and maintenance groups of Padreco Oil developed steps to put their findings into operation. For each of the five elements, both groups outlined activities designed to remove existing barriers to positive, productive interface and to establish healthy relationships. They also set up completion dates for each agreed upon step and responsibilities for monitoring the execution.

The final step in the model is progress review and replanning. In this step, follow up dates are scheduled; these could be three to six months from the first meetings. The groups will review their progress and their current relationship and continue to plan. In the Padreco Oil example, at the six month follow up, the relationship had improved. Both groups also saw changes in repair downtime, better maintenance of tools, reduced absenteeism, overtime,

and lost time due to accidents. A work order problem continued after six months although new ideas were implemented that would be reviewed in the next six months.<sup>24</sup>

If the conflict solving-model is used it can have many benefits for organizations, producing greater profits and creating a good problem-solving tool.

In conclusion, any conflict solving-model must have the commitment of the participants. They must be willing to acknowledge that a problem does exist, and they also must have the authority to make the recommended changes, or the whole process will be a waste of time.

#### THE USE OF MEDIATION AND NEGOTIATION

How can organizations respond and avoid disputes or litigation? Some organizations have improved their employment contracts, employee handbooks, and performance evaluations to make it clear what will happen to employees who are not suitable. Some have increased training for managers and supervisors in legal aspects or offered better communications of employee performance, violation of rules and disciplinary rules. There is also concern within

organizations for improving internal grievance procedures or implementing new grievance procedures.<sup>25</sup>

Another alternative or response to resolving disputes is the use of the mediation process which can be private, voluntary, informal and nonbinding. Through the use of this process, animosity can be defused, and a low-cost solution can rapidly be devised. The use of a private adjudicator can be more rapid, less costly and a less formal alternative than litigation.<sup>26</sup>

Conflict is inescapable. Individuals often find themselves helping others resolve their disputes. That is what a mediator does. The question is not whether a person will be able to mediate but how well they will do it.<sup>27</sup>

#### THE FIVE P'S OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

The five P's of conflict management establish a pattern that is common in most conflict situations. The first of the five P's is perception. People will often perceive conflict as being negative. Usually people will think of anger, tension, distrust, hostility, destruction, or disruption in relation to conflict. It is seldom that anyone thinks of conflict as being positive.

Conflict allows positive things such as opportunities for personal growth, intellectual challenge, excitement, and stimulation.

The second of the five P's of conflict management is problem. What kind of conflict usually arises between persons or groups? The problems could be disciplinary, performance or interpersonal relation.

The third P is process. To think that disputes are inherently unsolvable is incorrect. Disputes are solved by compromise, avoidance, litigation, negotiation, threats, consultation or mediation.

The next P is for principles. In order to effectively resolve a conflict situation certain rules of conduct should be followed. Justice and fairness are two fundamental elements that should be included when dealing with conflict situations. Also, in order to be just and fair, the parties must be willing to comply with the outcome.

The final P is for practices. There are four practical insights into the ways most disputes are handled. The first is power; the person with power will dominate. The next is self-interest; the parties will do what is in their best interest. The third is the consideration that all situations are unique and that it is necessary to be able to do what

is best in each given situation. The last is exploring all options, making sure that all options have been considered and choosing the right one.<sup>28</sup>

#### RESOLVING DISPUTES (COST OF CONFLICT)

In many situations, when conflict occurs, the results can be devastating to some. In many cases conflict results in termination of employees. Employees in turn may use litigation to offset or to prove their case.

Some of the causes for the increase of employee litigation stems from a more educated, assertive and minority-proportioned work force. Some of the main sources of current litigative increase are, the addition of anti-reprisal protections and review procedures for employees by EEO, the establishment of occupational safety and health, employer retirement income security, environmental protection, consumer protection legislation, and a value system of the baby boom generation that expects fair treatment and will not resist arbitrary actions.<sup>29</sup>

A dispute begins when one person or organization makes a



request or demands something from another, and the request or demand is rejected. There are many interests at stake. There are also certain standards or rights which must be considered for a fair outcome. In addition, there is also a certain balance of power. Interest, rights and power are three basic elements of any dispute. To resolve a dispute the parties must focus on one or more of these basic factors. The parties must seek to (1) reconcile interest, (2) determine who is right and (3) determine who is more powerful.

Interest can include needs, desires, concerns, and fears, things the parties care about or want. In reconciling interest the parties can negotiate or they may use mediation.

In order to effectively resolve a dispute emotions must first be set aside. Emotions often cause disputes, and disputes often cause emotions. When you remove emotions, resolving the dispute on the bases of interest becomes easier.

Peoples' rights are important, and they are and can be different depending on the circumstances at hand. It is difficult to reach an agreement on peoples' rights. In order to do this there must be some type of standard that is fair to all parties involved.

A third way to resolve disputes is based on power. Power is defined as the ability to get someone to do something he or she would not normally do.<sup>30</sup>

When cost is considered, reconciling interest is less costly than determining who is right, which, in turn, is less costly than determining who is more powerful. Who is more powerful will depend on which party is less dependent on the other. This does not mean that interest is better than rights and power but it can be less costly. Not all disputes can be resolved by reconciling interest. Rights and power procedures can sometimes be a better solution to disputes. Many times we will put a procedure which should be last in first position. In turn, this results in the difference between an effective system and a distressed system. In an effective system most disputes are resolved through reconciling interests, some through determining who is right, and the fewest through determining who is more powerful. By contrast, in a distressed resolution system, relatively few disputes are resolved through reconciling interests, while many are resolved through determining rights and power.<sup>31</sup>

Why do people resort to rights and power contests instead of negotiating? This happens because they lack skills, resources and obstacles in the organization.<sup>32</sup> In

order to reduce the cost of resolving disputes the interest of all parties must be considered because conflict is a normal aspect of life.<sup>33</sup>

#### ORGANIZATIONAL STYLES OF MANAGING CONFLICT

The styles mentioned here are very similar to the viewpoints included in the research mentioned earlier.

Three organizational styles of conflict management are liberal, middle-of-the-road and conservative. In the liberal style conflict is normal and can be managed. Conflict is discussed with the parties and worked out. They use bargaining, persuasion, problem solving and confrontation. Liberals believe that conflict should be encouraged and can be dealt with so that an "equilibrium state is attained."

In the middle-of-the-road style, conflict is inevitable and is very difficult to manage. Conflict is solved by majority rule, compromise or hierarchical appeal, the use of discussions, compromise, votes, change in structure or arbitration. Middle-of-the-road theorists believe that conflict sometimes arises, and that, depending on certain departments, occurrence is more likely, and that conflict should be minimized and managed.

In the conservative style, conflict is abnormal and must be suppressed, usually by use of authority. Those who support this style use or rely on dominance or power. Conservative theorists believe that conflict implies a step backward in managerial planning and control, and that conflict is abnormal and should be dealt with severely.

As one might assume, conflict, as most managers see it, is inefficient and detrimental. There are arguments that conflict is good for the organization. Conflict presents the opportunity for new leaders to arise. Conflict allows for change to occur and to examine a changing environment. It is possible for conflict to relieve boredom. Franklin Roosevelt would appoint assistants who would not agree with him and would provide conflicting advise. He would deliberately display the roles to stir up conflict to get the most effective results.<sup>34</sup>

Blake and Mouton (1964), presented five styles for handling conflict. They were the use of force, withdrawing, smoothing, compromising and problem solving. These styles are based on the attitudes of managers and the concern the managers have for production and for people.

Thomas (1976), reinterpreted Blake and Mouton by basing the five styles of handling conflict on the intentions of a

party or group, rather than on the attitudes of the managers. Managers might attempt to satisfy the other parties or groups concerns by using cooperativeness, whereas, parties or groups might attempt to satisfy their own concerns by using assertiveness.

As Blake, Mouton and Thomas demonstrate, the styles for handling conflict are differentiated on two basic dimensions, self and others. The first dimension is the degree, (high or low), to which people attempt to satisfy their own concerns. The second dimension is the degree, (high or low), to which people want to satisfy the concerns of others. Combining the two dimensions results in five specific styles of handling interpersonal conflict.

These five styles include integrating (win-win). This will result in high concern for self and others. In order to integrate the person must be willing to be open, to face the issue and to uncover conflict.

Another is obliging (lose-win). This is having low concern for self and high concern for others. This results in trying to satisfy others at their own expense.

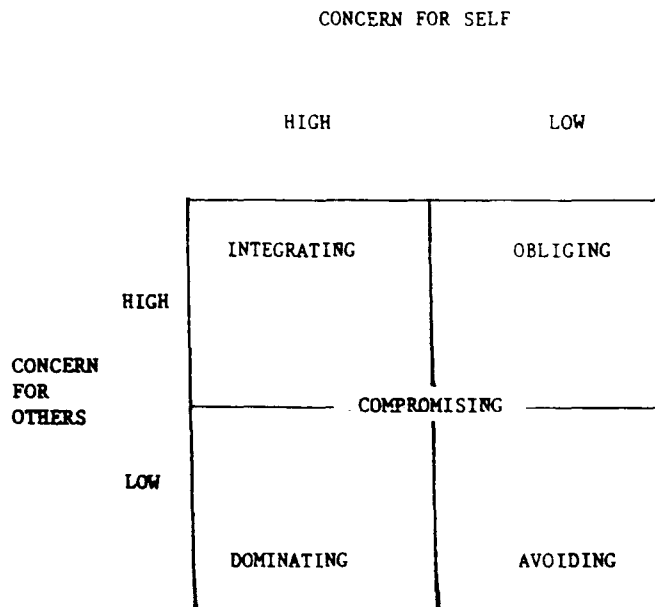
The third style is dominating (win-lose). One who dominates, has concern only for self and no one else.

The fourth style is avoiding. This is having concern

neither for self nor others. In this style, no action is taken and the situation will steer itself.

The fifth style is compromising (no win-no lose). This would be intermediate in concern for self and others. This would require a give-and-take action acceptable to all parties (see figure 4).

Figure 4  
TWO DIMENSIONAL MODEL OF STYLES FOR HANDLING CONFLICT



## FUTURE OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Dispute system design needs to be developed in both theory and practice. As a field, it is now in its infancy. In the future, dispute systems design may join the ranks of other well-known dispute resolution methods such as mediation and arbitration. For some, it may one day become a profession. For many managers, lawyers, diplomats and others, it should become essential, just as negotiation is now an essential tool in those fields.<sup>37</sup>

Organizations tend to be naive about the impact that intergroup relations can have on the ability the organization has to fulfill its mission. They are also naive about the relative merits and techniques of trying to improve working relations among groups. It is important to spend time and energy improving deteriorating group relations. This time and energy must be initiated by the manager. The manager is the agent in charge. The manager must be willing to risk and experiment with process for bringing about change.<sup>38</sup>

Conflict can be useful in some organizations and businesses. Conflict can be good or bad and the important

thing to remember is that a manager should design a control and conflict resolutions system to monitor the conflict in the organization.<sup>39</sup>

Conflict, no doubt, has many causes. It is rather surprising that authors often mention the limited research that has been done on this subject. Despite what has been revealed in this research, and all the insinuation that conflict can be positive and productive, the opposite is also true. Conflict can also limit productivity. Managers should seek the best method for dealing with the conflict they are confronted with and handle it. There really is no right way or wrong way for dealing with conflict. Conflict is prevalent in the work place and affects all organizations. The ability to manage conflict effectively is an everlasting aspect in the law enforcement profession.



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Afzabur Rahim, Managing Conflict in Organizations, (Connecticut: Praeayer Publishers Division, 1986), 1.

<sup>2</sup>William F. Glueck, Management, (Illinois: Dryden Press, a division of Holt, Rienhardt and Winston, 1977), 523-524.

<sup>3</sup>Rahim, Managing Conflict in Organizations, 1.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>9</sup>Glueck, Management, 526.

<sup>10</sup>Robert Maidment, Conflict, (Virginia: National Association of Secondary Principals, 1988), point 10.

<sup>11</sup>Henry Mintzberg, Mintzberg on Management: Inside Our Strange World of Organizations, (New York: The Free Press, a division of MacMillian Publishers, 1989), 238.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 239-240.

<sup>13</sup>Thomas Edwards, "Officer May File Lawsuit" San Antonio Express-News (July 1992): 1-B.

<sup>14</sup>Mintzberg, Mintzberg on Management, 241.

<sup>15</sup>Allen R. Cohen, et al., Effective Behavior in Organizations: Learning from the interplay of cases, concepts, and student experiences, (Illinois: Richard D. Irwin, Inc. 1980), 305.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 306.

<sup>17</sup>Robert R. Blake, et al., Solving Costly Organizational Conflicts, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., 1984), 4.

- <sup>18</sup>Glueck, Management, 526-527.
- <sup>19</sup>Blake, Solving Costly Organizational Conflict, 5.
- <sup>20</sup>Organizational Change: Changing Intergroup Relations, 123.
- <sup>21</sup>Susan L. Carpenter, Public Disputes, (New York: Jossey-Bass Inc., 1988), 18-19.
- <sup>22</sup>Blake, Solving Costly Organizational Conflict, 37-38.
- <sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, ix.
- <sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 39-53.
- <sup>25</sup>Alan F. Westin, Resolving Employment Disputes Without Litigation, (Washington D.C. The Bureau of National Affairs Inc., 1988), 4.
- <sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 285.
- <sup>27</sup>Joseph Stulbert, Taking Charge/Managing Conflict, (Massachusetts: D. C. Heath and Company, 1987), 2.
- <sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 11-26.
- <sup>29</sup>Westin, Resolving Employment Disputes Without Litigation, 3.
- <sup>30</sup>Ury, Getting Disputes Resolved, 6-8.
- <sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 19.
- <sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 31.
- <sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 170.
- <sup>34</sup>Glueck, Management, 525-527.
- <sup>35</sup>Rahim, Managing Conflict in Organizations, 17-19.
- <sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 20.
- <sup>37</sup>Ury, Getting Disputes Resolved, 172.
- <sup>38</sup>Organizational Change: Changing Intergroup Relations, 123.
- <sup>39</sup>Glueck, Management, 523.

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