

Conflict Management Strategies

Previous literature has tended to focus on either third-party managerial intervention or ADR, a focus which has kept discussions of formal and informal strategies conceptually distinct. Since this model incorporates a wider range of strategies, the strategies discussed below include both formal mechanisms (e.g., mediation and arbitration) as well as informal strategies (e.g., advising) which some authors might refer to as "tactics." The desire to include both formal and informal conflict management strategies has been one of the challenges to parsimony in the development and presentation of this framework.

In order to overcome this difficulty, it was necessary to devise a typology for identification and classification of the entire range of available strategies. Ury, Brett, and Goldberg's (1988) presentation of three orientations to managing conflict—interests, rights, and power—supplied this typology. In order to include the range of available strategies, conflict management options are introduced below in relation to whether they are interests-based (attempting to reconcile disputants' underlying interests), rights-based (focusing on determining who is right in accordance with some accepted guidelines for behavior), or power-based (attempting to resolve conflicts based on who has the most power). Within each category, strategies are further broken down into a discussion of those that are formal versus informal and whether their use involves no third party, an intervening manager, an intervening other, or an external third party.

Interests-Based Strategies

Negotiation, or negotiated ADR (Costantino & Merchant, 1996), occurs when disputants reach their own settlement without intervention by a third party. While negotiation is frequently thought of as a formal process involving representatives for each party, this form of negotiation is more consistent with a union than a non-union setting. Because this framework is intended for use in non-union settings, the only form of negotiation that is applicable is the informal process where disputants try to reach agreement on their own.

When disputants are unable to manage a conflict on their own, one or both disputants may turn to a third party for advice. Kolb's (1986) ethnographic study of ombudspersons found that third parties often use an *advising* strategy where they act as counselors. Advisers in Kolb's study either spoke to a single party, acted as a go-between, or facilitated discussions between the parties to help them see each other's point of view. Third parties in this case may include supervisors, peers, mentors, or human resources practitioners. Since this strategy is conceptually distinct from those where a third party actually facilitates communication between disputants, facilitation is discussed below as a separate interests-based strategy. Note that like negotiation, advising or seeking advice is an informal conflict management strategy.

Costantino and Merchant (1996) have grouped a number of third-party strategies under the heading of facilitated ADR. Their definition of facilitated ADR

believe disputants will not come to a solution on their own. Empirical support for the use of this strategy indicates that managers may use a combination of interests- and power-based strategies in their approach to conflict management.

Shapiro and Rosen's (1994) investigation of managerial intervention strategies found support for managers' use of mediation. By including ratings of mediation self-efficacy in their study, they concluded that managers who perceived higher self-efficacy with mediation were more likely to use it. This has obvious implications for the role of conflict management training in increasing the range of conflict management strategies used by a third party.

Karambayya and Brett (1989) integrated the strategies suggested by Sheppard (1984) and Kolb (1986) and asked participants to engage in a series of conflict simulations. A questionnaire then asked participants to provide disputants' perceptions of third-party roles, outcomes, and the fairness of procedures. A factor analysis of results found support for mediation, although their definition of the strategy was markedly different from those described above. Items included in the mediator factor were described as similar to the behaviors performed by mediators in the legal setting where questions are asked, proposals are integrated, and managers shuttle back and forth between disputants to try to resolve a conflict.

The preceding discussion reveals that there is a substantial body of research on the use of mediation as a strategy for intraorganizational conflict management. Research on organizational due process procedures reveals that companies are beginning to include internal mediation in their informal processes. Organizations may train ombudspersons, human resources staff, or peer mediators to manage conflicts that are inappropriate for formal procedures (Dibble, 1997; Harness & Mook, 1997; Ritzky, 1994; Simon & Sochynsky, 1995). In some cases, companies even provide for the use of external mediation as part of a formal process. Unfortunately, the question of when mediation is used, either as an internal or external option, remains unclear (Ritzky, 1994). It is generally assumed that mediation is only formal (utilizing an external service provider) when it is court mandated.

In summary, four main types of interests-based strategies were identified as relevant to intraorganizational conflict management: negotiation, advising, facilitation, and mediation. All of these strategies are informal, with the exception that mediation might also be a formal strategy when it involves the use of an external provider. With the exception of negotiation, all interests-based strategies involve a third party. Intervening managers, intervening others, and external third parties may all potentially use these interests-based strategies. Previous research has determined that intervening managers or intervening others are most likely to use advising, while intervening others or external third parties are most likely to use facilitation or mediation.

Rights-Based Strategies

Because most dispute systems have been designed to handle grievances, a number of formal, rights-based strategies may be found in the organizational context. Formal rights-based strategies are usually carried out by a designated human

resources representative or a senior executive officer of the organization (Ewing, 1989). Companies may also utilize an ombudsperson or a peer review board in their grievance process. In rare cases an external third party, such as an arbitrator, may become involved as well. Research has also revealed informal strategies that adopt a rights-based orientation. Since these have been less widely discussed, evidence of informal rights-based strategies will be reviewed first, followed by the formal strategies that comprise many grievance procedures.

Sheppard's (1984) framework of third-party intervention included two strategies that place the third party in a judge-like role. *Adversarial intervention* is described as a courtroom style procedure wherein disputants have control over the presentation of their case and the manager determines an appropriate solution. *Inquisitorial intervention* is similar, except that the manager assumes more control over the process by asking the disputants questions rather than allowing them full control over case presentation. In both of these strategies, the conflict is framed as a win-lose situation and the third party acts as the judge. While the third party does retain outcome control, the fact that disputants are given an opportunity to present their case and influence the final decision should result in higher perceptions of fairness and satisfaction with outcomes (Shapiro, 1993). This is significantly different from a third-party strategy where an outcome is determined autocratically, without giving consideration to disputants' arguments or opinions.

In two studies of managerial intervention strategies Karambayya and Brett (1989, 1994) have confirmed that managers do perform a judge-like role. In the 1989 study discussed earlier, Karambayya and Brett found evidence of a strategy they called inquisitor, supporting Sheppard's (1984) inquisitorial intervention strategy. The term arbitrator has also been used to describe managerial intervention activities, illustrating that managers are likely to emulate more formal rights-based interventions in the process of informal conflict management (Karambayya & Brett, 1994; Kolb & Glidden, 1986; Olson-Buchanan et al., 1998). While it is possible that an intervening other could also perform these informal rights-based strategies, disputants are less likely to accept outcome control from a peer (Keashly & Newberry, 1995). When intervening others use rights-based strategies, it is more likely to be in conjunction with a formal grievance process.

While the most common in-house conflict management designs are open-door policies (Ewing, 1989; Lipsky & Seeber, 1997; McCabe, 1988; McDermott, 1995), the informal nature of these policies combined with employees' fears of negative repercussions has resulted in the creation of more formal venues for expressing grievances. One strategy employed by organizational due process procedures is *investigation*. An investigator has no power to impose a solution. The purpose of this strategy is to listen to the employee's problem, conduct an investigation, and determine the most appropriate course of action. This strategy is generally referred to as fact-finding in ADR parlance (Costantino & Merchant, 1996).

Another strategy that may be combined with investigation or fact-finding is *internal adjudication*. The adjudicator may be a senior executive or a peer review board made up of a combination of managers and lower-level employees (Ewing,

1989; McCabe, 1988; McDermott, 1995). Formal adjudicative strategies are only available for conflicts involving alleged violations of company policy, such as wrongful termination claims, safety hazards, or unwarranted disciplinary action. Adjudicators are only granted the authority to interpret right or wrong. They do not have the authority to change policy or offer alternative solutions to the conflict (Ewing, 1989; McCabe, 1988). This is another clear example of a formal, rights-based third-party intervention.

There are also non-binding rights-based strategies, known as *advisory ADR* (Costantino & Merchant, 1996). Advisory ADR strategies enlist the services of an external third party and may range from relatively simple to elaborate procedures. Some of these include private judging, mini-trials, summary jury trials, early neutral evaluation, and advisory arbitration (Costantino & Merchant, 1996; Costello, 1996; Singer, 1990). Each of these methods entails some degree of presentation of arguments and evidence to a third party who makes a finding which is then used by the parties to determine how to proceed. For example, if parties who feel confident they will win in court are advised that their case is not very strong, they may be more inclined to agree to mediation (of course, the reverse is also true). Because these strategies tend to be expensive and time-consuming, they are more likely to be used in complex inter-organizational conflicts (Costello, 1996). Because advisory ADR has the potential to induce disputants to try mediation, it may be used in certain types of intraorganizational disputes and is included in this framework.

Some organizational grievance procedures offer *arbitration* as the final level of appeal (Ewing, 1989; McCabe, 1988). While organizations have traditionally been reluctant to have an outsider interpret and make binding decisions regarding their internal policies, many have realized that they need to include an arbitration option to demonstrate to employees that they are willing to limit their authority (McCabe, 1997; Peterson, 1994). As with internal adjudicators, arbitrators are limited to making an interpretation of policy and do not judge the fairness of a policy or suggest creative solutions (McCabe, 1988).

In review, rights-based strategies may be informal, such as the use of adversarial and inquisitorial intervention by managers. On the formal side, rights-based strategies are often found as part of organizational grievance procedures. Intervening others may use fact-finding or adjudicative strategies, while external third parties may be called in under special circumstances (such as human rights violations that have potential for litigation) to use the strategies of advisory or binding arbitration.

Power-Based Strategies

Because the goal of ADR is to offer less adversarial approaches to conflict management than are provided in the courts, it is not surprising that the dispute system design research emphasizes interests- and rights-based strategies. Due to the significance of the role of power in organizations, however, it would be an oversight not to include power-based approaches in a comprehensive model of intraorganizational conflict management.

In the organizational context, power-based approaches may be used by a variety of organizational members. Intervening managers and intervening others may act *autocratically*, either by imposing a solution or *restructuring* work assignments to minimize interdependence of the disputants (Karambayya & Brett, 1994; Kolb, 1986). Managers may also use the strategy of *providing impetus*, offering the threat of punishment or promise of a reward, to coerce disputants to settle conflicts on their own (Karambayya & Brett, 1989; Sheppard, 1984). The strategy of providing impetus was prevalent among the managers interviewed by Sheppard (1984) and has found considerable support from other studies as well.

Irving and Meyer (1997) conducted a multidimensional scaling analysis of managerial styles and found that managers tend to either approach or avoid conflict. When managers prefer not to get involved, threatening disputants that they had better manage the problem on their own provides managers with a quick way out. Morrill's (1991) work also documented managerial tendencies to confront or avoid conflict. In addition, Prein's (1987) four categories of third-party intervention strategies included one labeled "powerless or unsure third party," while Shapiro and Rosen (1994) also reported a managerial strategy of "overlooking." All of these studies illustrate that third parties (particularly managers) often prefer to avoid dealing directly with conflict.

Even when intervening managers or intervening others start out using an interests-based approach, such as mediation, they may be likely to use their power to promote or enforce a particular solution. This is the premise behind intravention, as discussed above (Conlon, Carnevale, & Murningham, 1994). Ewing's (1989) case studies also reported that even when mediation was used as part of a due process procedure, it was really "power mediation," where disputants were strongly encouraged to accept a mediated settlement rather than moving on to more formal strategies that might result in negative repercussions.

Prior research suggests that there are times when power-based strategies are appropriate, such as when there is high time pressure, low interdependence, and a broad range of impact (Elangovan, 1998; Lewicki & Sheppard, 1985). Power-based strategies may also be expected by the disputing parties when the third party is seen as an expert or in control over the issue in conflict (Keashly & Newberry, 1995).

In addition to the power-based strategies reviewed above, third parties or disputants may recognize that the source of a conflict is structural and that a rebalancing of power to generate organizational change is necessary (Rummel, 1976). This is the position taken by Pondy (1992) and Putnam (1994) when they recommend that managers assume the role of *conflict orchestrator*. This strategy would entail renaming conflicts to introduce the underlying causes rather than dealing with surface issues. The desire to examine underlying issues may be particularly salient when a conflict is rooted in cultural differences or diversity (Donnellon & Kolb, 1994). While there is little empirical data to provide exemplars of the use of this strategy in organizations, much theoretical work suggests that managers should