

# CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING MANAGEMENT

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## INTRODUCTION: TENSION VERSUS CONFLICT

An organisation composed of individuals presupposes the existence of an element of tension and can be observed at all levels of the organisational structure. Within that structure, certain tasks must be performed, objectives fulfilled and deadlines met. The success of an organisation is measured by both its ability to get tasks done and the efficiency with which targets are achieved. These prerequisites for success contribute greatly to a business' continuing competitiveness and viability. Without an infrastructure to determine not only how things are done but by whom, it is only a question of time before the business loses its competitive edge and begins to decline.

Tension in the transactional nature of goods or services provided in return for payment and reward directly affects the corporate or organisational structure of the provider, alerting it to competition, market forces and the value of its product. A degree of tension permeating an organisation is one crucial guarantee against complacency and indolent self-satisfaction. It is therefore important to stress that tension can be creative and productive but to ensure that it is perceived in this way, it has to be of the type that coheres and is controlled. This is achievable when it is apparent that all positions within the organisation carry responsibility and an obligation to implement decisions that have been taken.

I would argue that a valid distinction can be made between tension on the one hand and conflict on the other. The line that divides them may, at times, appear perilously thin, and tensions, as a result of either misunderstanding or manipulation, can transform into conflicts. Creative tensions are productive when it is clear that although belief in one's product and in

one's role in producing it have been vindicated, one is still spurred on to achieve more in the future. This motivation must emanate from the managerial level to all concerned in the success of the enterprise and will be evident in the way planning, consultative and decision making processes are undertaken. It may be objected at this stage that such a distinction is unrealistic and in practice, unworkable on the grounds that it is impossible to sustain exclusively creative tension when individual personalities, egos and temperaments encounter other like-minded individuals with alternative ideas and suggestions. Indeed, the potential for conflict arising from such a belief in creative input can be alarmingly high and ultimately counter-productive but only an organisation that has the wit and maturity to foresee such a danger, and moreover has the mechanisms in place to deal with it, is likely to value tension in the first place.

Conflicting ideas do not automatically generate conflict, a further distinction that will become clear when the particular type of organisational culture is considered later. The "sources" and "causes" of conflict are terms often conflated in management guides that overlook their subtle differences in order to warn the managerial classes of the detrimental effects of conflict, regardless of the guise in which it appears. The industrial strife of the 1970's in Britain is a lamentable testament to the chaos engendered by panic and intransigence. The sources of conflict could be said to consist of the underlying weaknesses in the organisational structure that can escalate into specific causes of conflict. Such potential sources of conflict are to be found in weak or autocratic management, poor or blocked communication links within the organisation which lead to ill defined roles and unclear organisational aims and objectives. Moreover, the absence of or failure of procedures to deal with conflict as and when it arises is indicative of an organisation that relies on ad hoc solutions to problems and the uncertain benefits of short term expediency.

However, it must be borne in mind that such underlying sources of conflict might only seldom or never become actual causes of conflict. The size and structure of the organisation play a determining role in limiting the scope for conflict and for controlling its repercussions. This said, there are a number of generally accepted causes of conflict, the most debilitating

of which is the result of apparently serious and irreconcilable personal differences between members of staff or between staff and management. Personality clashes may reflect deep seated resentments that are exacerbated by uncertainties over roles and responsibilities within the organisation. Conflict of this nature in a school environment is worsened by the fact that it cannot be contained in the same way as a "boardroom struggle" or departmental dispute can. Proximity to the student body (or customer base, to borrow a privatization phrase) makes it difficult to rule out the possibility of the conflict filtering through the school to those who may be adversely, albeit indirectly affected by it. Furthermore, the problem is compounded by the fact that elements of the student body are often the cause of classroom based conflict which in turn aggravates disputes over classroom management styles and the methods employed in maintaining discipline without sacrificing pedagogic obligations.

Conflict of this sort may reveal fundamental differences in the value systems among both the teaching and administrative staff, particularly in the private sector where quality of service is often subordinate to profit but it can also be detected in the public sector when a scarcity of resources or funding obliges all involved to compromise. This may lead to conflicts over pay and conditions, one of the most salient and publicized areas of open disagreement. Taken in conjunction with the actual or perceived failure of the management to appreciate the problems incurred in implementing decisions that were taken without due consultation of those charged with the task of carrying them out, it is clear that the absence of a procedure whereby grievances can be redressed will lead to an inexorable growth in frustration and hostility. Management that abdicates the responsibility to deal directly with the cause of conflict and fails, retrospectively to rectify the source of that conflict is ill equipped to cope with its results or to offer realistic solutions.

#### CONTEXT AND BOUNDARIES:

The books, periodicals and other publications that discuss the roles and functions of management concentrate essentially on principles of management that can, with variation be adapted to most organisational structures. Such

a flexible and general approach is essential because no two organisations will experience exactly the same problems or be faced with identical alternatives, the better to deal with them. In the same way, conflict may be caused by comparable factors that are nevertheless, in practice, unique to a particular organisation and which will, due to inevitable individual differences, be dealt with differently. Management guides that ignore the fundamental "human factor" are of little practical value or alternatively, offer "college-spun wisdom" that amounts to little more than a series of theoretically possible platitudes. Consequently, any analysis of organisational conflict must prioritize context. This entails consideration of the organisational structure and culture, its age and personnel and the mechanisms (if any) that exist for the resolution of disputes. That certain procedures are in place is neither a vindication of their efficacy nor proof that they have ever been properly tested. A small organisation like a privately owned language school, comprising a small staff is more likely to try and resolve conflict on a strictly inter-personal basis for the simple reason that a greater degree of intimacy is found at all levels and in all aspects of the business. The introduction of a formal conflict resolving mechanism is somewhat superfluous although it is fair to say that in such "cottage industry" organisations, the absence of any formally established procedures might reflect a similar disregard for employee rights, terms and conditions of employment as well as security of tenure.

Potentially more destructive in small organisations is the risk of conflict arising from personal animosity and which is handled with insufficient circumspection. Impartiality is harder to exercise and the manifestation of conflict may be construed, *inter alia*, as a direct assault on the management's integrity. Should this in fact be the case, the questioned integrity is put to a further test in the way the dispute is dealt with. Any organisation needs to have boundaries of responsibility and accountability if it is to function effectively. In the same way a school has clearly delineated boundary walls or fences, all organisations occupy physical space that partly defines them as entities. To broaden the analogy, organisations like schools permit contained and constrained freedom of movement within those boundaries. Whereas a school restricts movement by meting out punishments for transgression of its rules, other organisations

rely more on tacit agreement being given to their rules. As a result, there is an implicit assumption that members of an organisation will seek to avoid conflict because of the obligations imposed by their membership of it. Boundaries are not to be crossed unless permission has been explicitly given or is sanctioned as part of a more egalitarian corporate ethos, one that promotes the free trade in ideas and input. In his book, "The Territorial Imperative" (1967), Robert Ardrey argued that animal behaviour was largely determined by the need to defend territorial rights and this can be extended, by analogy to organisations where the boundaries of territory are mapped out physically, procedurally and socially. Violation of that territory in a schools context may take the form of various physical impedimenta such as reorganisation of teaching space, restricted or shared access to teaching materials and aids or the noise from a neighbouring class that amounts to "violation of another's air space". Where the lines of communication are blocked or simply malfunctioning, territory is more jealously guarded. Amalgamation of functions and responsibilities contains the seeds of discord because it may lead to overcrowding and an element of ambiguity concerning roles. It may create factions or force divisions among those who are henceforth expected to work even more closely than before.

Before turning to the dimensions of organisational life in schools that can both precipitate and help to resolve conflict, it is necessary to stress that a state of untroubled harmony as the ultimate managerial objective is neither attainable nor particularly desirable. An organisation that requires of its employees active and creative involvement presupposes negotiation and consultation as part of the process whereby decisions are made. When creativity is valued, certain responsibilities are invested in or delegated to individuals or teams of individuals either in accordance with the office held or as part of a special appointment. Those individuals may produce conflicting ideas, the testing of which at an early stage helps to reduce the risk of overlooking a serious flaw that emerges later. To this it could be added that the absence of conflict is symptomatic of organisational malaise in so far as the management has failed in its obligation to foster creative thinking. An apparent lack of interest is likely to lead instead to lazy thinking on important issues and reduce morale to the point where the organisation's inability to compete or pull back from the brink

spell disaster (Everard & Morris:1990). An alternative scenario is one in which disaster is forever being averted by eleventh hour expediency brought about by dilatory decision making and managerial unwillingness to change its decision making process. Any company that overcomes self-induced panic by placing its workforce on perpetual "life boat drill" can only have a higher authority to thank.

#### ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE AND CULTURE:

Schools acquire an identity as both institutions and organisations, the former determined by legal recognition and obligation, the latter by the individuals who function within it. As a school exists to provide an educational service, certain organisational needs have to be fulfilled and these have been identified (Adair:1983) as task, group and individual needs. Implementation of the curriculum and preparation for examinations are clearly tasks that have to be done but their successful execution depends on maintenance of the group. Encouraging and motivating members of the group, setting standards and harnessing individualism to the values of teamwork are vital in the sense that antagonistic factions are detrimental to both task and group needs. Individual needs, derived from Maslow's principle of hierarchical needs is relevant to this discussion in that failure to satisfy personal needs leads, not only to a loss of morale and motivation but to greater concern for the individual than the group. Conflict arising from managerial neglect of personal needs may become acrimonious and overt or festering and covert. Organisational structure, like relationships ".has no separate existence other than through the roles and relationships through which the structure is expressed.." (White et al:1991), a point that has been developed by Paisey (1981) to show that a school's structure is defined by the distribution of jobs, position and authority within the organisation.

However, together with this formal description of structure must be included the informal aspects of structure that are not defined by titles and specific job descriptions. The formal model which tends to conform to a pyramidal or top-down view of management assumes an unproblematic hierarchical chain of command that is both rational and verifiable but apart from the fact that decision making in education is often as dependent on intuition as

it is on more rational processes, organisations are seldom as stable as exponents of the formal model maintain. As Everard & Morris argue (Ibid), there is conflict inherent in the relationship between those with the authority that derives from expertise (i.e. the teachers) and those who exercise positional authority (i.e. the Head and Director of Studies). Organisational structure that fails to acknowledge such an underlying "source" of potential conflict in schools also fails to recognise the ways in which the aims of pedagogy on the one hand and the requirements of quality and efficiency on the other can become the focus of entrenched rival interests.

The democratic model places more emphasis on expertise and the authority that derives from it and through maximum participation, strives for consensus rather than conflict. The egalitarianism of its normative, re-educative approach to power distribution centres upon processes of decision making and innovation that are devised for the mutual benefit of all concerned. In its power sharing it is quite unlike the political model where power is effectively a prize to be won as a result of bargaining and negotiation. Aims and objectives are contested in this model with the collegiality of the democratic model replaced by factions which compete for power and resources. Externally imposed restrictions on funding or the implementation of major innovations are examples of the ways in which the prevalence of conflict in the political model could easily be transformed into factional intransigence.

With the subjective and ambiguity models that focus upon the mutability of organisational aims, the primacy of individual interpretations of those aims and the decentralisation of the decision making process, it becomes clear that organisations are not presented with theoretically equal and equally possible structural alternatives. Their applicability depends, according to Bush (1986), on the extent to which the factors of institutional size, organisational structure, time, the availability of resources and the rate of environmental change are significant in any given situation. Whether or not a school exhibits particular signs of one (or more) of these models can be located in the organisational culture that characterises it.

Writing in 1976, Charles Handy (Understanding Organisations:1976/1985)

discussed the ways in which attitudes and relationships create a climate or culture within an organisation that is either productive or destructive. Apart from arguing that the weaknesses in an organisation frequently stem from the imposition of an alien and incongruous culture or organisational ideology, he points out that cultures may differ, even within an organisation. As schools have both specified and unstated goals, it could be claimed that conflict arises from the inappropriate mixture of cultures. Having identified the four cultures as A) power or club B) role C) task and D) person, Handy stresses that "...there are no wholly good and no wholly bad cultures.." (Ibid, preferring to say that people often become "culturally blinkered" and incapable of envisaging alternative ways of doing things.

The power culture depends on a central and often charismatic head and is observable mostly in small schools and the private sector. Despite the relative informality of the lines of communication, the scope for conflict often increases in proportion to the size of the school. Privately owned schools invariably seek to expand and this puts a certain strain on the relative intimacy hitherto enjoyed. Owners who also fill the roles of administrator and teacher (a common phenomenon in Greece and Turkey) can find themselves ill-equipped to maintain this combination of functions when their schools expand and the recruitment of more staff becomes a necessity but, at the same time, they may be peculiarly reluctant to devolve power to subordinates. When a school is made in its owner's image, its success is bound up with his/her unique management style which makes it difficult for a successor to take over without feeling overshadowed. More significantly, conflict can occur in situations where the head is too engrossed in the intricacies of power management to welcome or give due consideration to innovation and "unsolicited" opinion. It cannot be denied that power cultures occasionally breed arrogance and stubbornness in managers. If this is consistently maintained, it can reduce less independent minded employees to a state of dutiful, reliable timidity and drive away those who feel undervalued.

Unlike power cultures, role cultures prevail in an atmosphere of statutorily defined conventions and job functions. Administrative efficiency is best served by such a culture and employees are expected to subordinate individuality to the role they play in the organisation. As White has pointed

out though (Ibid):

"This can sometimes lead to conflict because teachers tend not to subscribe to the same set of values as characterise members of a role culture".

Pedagogic concerns are not always reconcilable with administrative attention to efficiency and there exists, within this culture a latent antagonism between the individuality that is inevitably expressed through teaching and the passive occupancy of a role defined by the organisation. In short, teaching and administrative staff frequently have different value systems which in practice can mean that although there are shared organisational goals, objectives may be quite dissimilar.

In contrast to power and role cultures, person and task cultures prioritise individual input rather than uniformity. The person culture values minimal organisation in order to foster individual talent but despite its orientation towards creative input, this organisational culture centres heavily upon the brightest star in the firmament. Company "whizz kids" are usually revered and despised in equal measure, their elevated status the source of envious frustration. It is a potentially damaging ideology for two reasons. In the first place, it drives a wedge between the "conquering hero" and his colleagues, the latter perceived not so much as participants in group decision making as functionaries, entrusted with the relatively humble task of carrying out his will or rubberstamping his plans. Secondly, and potentially more destabilising for the overall profile of the organisation is the likelihood of such an individual being "headhunted" by competitors or other organisations. This would create a vacuum, the harder to fill internally because of the absence of nurtured talent.

Task culture, on the other hand, is based on the premise that a group or team of talents is applied to a particular project or plan. Members of the team function inter-dependently under team leaders rather than managers and progress is reviewed in conditions of mutual co-operation. The school structure that benefits most from this approach is the one in which "tailor made" courses or specialised programmes require the flexibility afforded by smaller teams. Although a task culture creates the conditions in which responses to changes can be implemented, it is fair to say that interdependence

is often hard to achieve in practice and relies upon the commitment of each member of the team. According to Belbin's analysis, a team consists of a number of functions that must be performed by its members. All these functions (shaper, innovator, organiser, team worker etc.) have to be covered if the team is to function well but it does not account for those who may feel inadequate to meet the obligations placed upon them. Moreover, as Handy points out (Ibid:p.194), morale in the group declines when team leaders begin competing for resources that have to be rationed. It is at this stage that managers may feel obliged to intervene and instigate procedures and methods that bear more than a passing resemblance to a power or role culture situation. In short, the task culture is ".difficult..to control and inherently unstable by itself.." and is often inappropriate ".for the climate and the technology."

The conclusion to be drawn from the comparison of organisational cultures is that different aspects of the organisation favour different cultures and that it is erroneous to assume that one is, by definition better than another. However, when more than one culture exists within an organisation, the basis for conflict is apparent; parity is seldom fully achievable and schools are potential arenas of struggle between the competing interests of administrative and teaching staff. It is the job of management to show how conflicting interests can and should be complementary aims, a topic I shall return to later.

#### EXTERNAL PRESSURES:

The cultural pressures imposed on businesses established abroad can be as debilitating as the patience required to get to grips with bureaucratic procedures that are often as arcane as they are byzantine. ELT organisations abroad like the British Council, Interlingua and the privately owned schools opened in conjunction with local businessmen (the latter often being a legal requirement) are exposed to cultural differences that are potential sources of intractable conflict. In provincial areas served by existing language schools, well established practices and networks of familial and clan-like interdependence may prove to be surprisingly durable in resisting "foreign" encroachment on their territory. Furthermore, religion, politics and ethnic

concerns are volatile issues in certain cultural contexts. Apart from the exclusion of women from the teaching staff in countries like Saudi Arabia, the curriculum and timetabling have to be sensitive to religious festivals and give heed to the proscription of certain topics of debate. Racial considerations may influence the decision to engage a very well-qualified and competent teacher of Asian or West Indian origin in countries where this is either rare or disapproved of. Moreover, teachers and management must be attuned to the pedagogic implications of racial conflict in the classroom itself when members of either persecuted minorities (e.g. Greek Albanians) or the offspring of refugees are unwelcome among their peers. In situations like these, management can contain the effect of external pressures upon its organisational structure but must have the flexibility to adapt to the unpredictable and even irrational manifestations of cultural conflict.

#### GOAL THEORY AND ROLE AMBIGUITY:

In a chapter entitled "the Culture of Consent", (The Age of Unreason:1988), the seemingly ubiquitous Charles Handy declares that "Intelligent people prefer to agree than to obey." His argument is that intelligent organisations comprise individuals who have both considerable access to information and a clear idea of their responsibility in the achievement of tasks. Such organisations are run by persuasion and consent and authority is not automatically conferred by the possession of a title. Goal theory is based on the premise that all people are rational and that where "Y" is the objective, we need to do "X" in order to attain it. Conflict, on the other hand has both rational and irrational components which suggests that a distinction needs to be made between the causes of realistic and unrealistic conflict. A head who is forced to choose between two equally suitable and qualified candidates for an internal promotion, may, rather like Buridan's ass see no reason for preferring one more than the other. Whichever choice is eventually made, the risk of upsetting the other remains a distinct possibility while electing to make an external appointment runs the risk of doubling the frustration internally. Heads, like managers must be alert to the ways in which self-concept and the ego-ideal are powerful inner propulsion factors and figure prominently in reinforcement theory. In short, this states that

accentuating the positive strengthens self-image and self-confidence and is therefore particularly relevant to research that has been undertaken in schools. Valuing individual achievement is a vital preliminary step to understanding roles and groups. If we accept that human behaviour is determined by personality and conditioned by situation, then the need to compete is a logical corollary of the organisational encouragement of positive self-image. Competition between groups is, as we have seen a potential cause of conflict but it is the management's job to accept that it can be appropriate while simultaneously assessing the levels at which it is both desirable and maximally efficient.

Tajfel's experiments (Makin et al :1989) showed that people unconsciously discriminate in favour of the group to which they belong regardless of how tenuous the links are with its other members. In doing so, one's self-image is boosted by pooled dependence but although any group will partially conflict with another, specific economic and psychological factors figure prominently in situations where competition gives rise to conflict. The economic factors include competition for scarce resources which may be of a financial, technological or staffing nature. Moreover, different perceptions of or evaluations of the goals to be reached by different groups are potentially incompatible which raises the further problem of deciding to what extent and in which ways groups are dependent on each other. Organisational structures such as schools imply reciprocal dependency in which complex activities are planned and effected as the result of the flow of information between groups. The potential for conflict is at its highest in this situation because groups do more than simply pool contributions; the efficient running of the organisation is measured by the success of its inter-dependent components and conflict between one or more groups has a knock-on effect elsewhere. Management that tries to isolate the warring factions may not succeed in containing the problem because even a localised breakdown will have a deleterious effect on the organisation, obliging others to compensate for the weakness and risking the outbreak of further conflict.

Inter-group conflicts are intensified when emotions are allowed to distort perceptions and cloud judgement. As we have seen, schools tend to embody aspects of alternative organisational culture but when one group identifies

another group as the embodiment of that particular culture, and what is more, is in competition with it, the distinctions between them are sharpened. Negative feelings towards the other group manifest themselves in reciprocal accusations of hostility and aggression in which both abilities and motives are questioned. It may also be expressed more covertly in situations where real issues are sidestepped or actions are taken which affect but are not divulged to the other group. As noted by Everard & Morris (Ibid), inexperienced managers or heads may try to "...use conflict to win support-often with disastrous consequences for the organisation.." (p.98). This would actually widen the gulf between the groups and seriously undermine the head's credibility if and when intervention became not merely advisable but necessary.

All organisational structures and the cultures that inform them reflect complex webs of relationships. Within the organisation, one invariably has different relationships with the same people and consequently one's role is also defined by the perceptions others have of it. This presumes a strategic alignment between the structure and the shared values of its members and ideally results in open lines of communication, co-operation and respect for the integrity of constituent roles. However, the vital factor of trust cannot be overlooked in the analysis and when it is lacking or simply guarded, an element of obfuscation creeps into our perceptions of those roles. It may manifest itself in the suspicion that others interpret their roles idiosyncratically and are substituting "habits" for the shared values of the organisation. That trust, as Covey says, is "...the fruit of trustworthiness.." (Principle Centred Leadership:1989) and underpins organisational philosophies that regard roles as expressions of empowerment. However, real or suspected role ambiguity is a challenge, both to the individual entrusted with the functions that define the role and the management, whose decision it was to appoint the individual concerned.

I would argue that one of the most serious underlying causes of role ambiguity is to be found in the conflict of explicit and implicit expectations, the latter characterised by uncertainty and a lack of clarity concerning the extent of the role. For want of space, job vacancies in national papers and specialist publications tend to focus on the explicit duties and

responsibilities of the job being advertised and list the qualifications and experience deemed necessary for the successful fulfilment of the role. In a recent British Council advertisement for an English Language Officer, the duties were outlined with an array of participial forms such as "advising", "supporting", "providing" and "managing". Undoubtedly, some clarification of these duties would occur during an interview for the post but their range and scope are essentially interpreted by individuals exercising judgement and initiative. In short, there is no yardstick for measuring the "support" one gives or the service one "provides" that applies across the board, with minimal variation. Similarly, schools that advertise "demanding positions with excellent prospects" and require of applicants an "enthusiasm to adapt" place their own interpretation on the range of duties and functions the position entails. Of course it can be argued that the administrator of a school is best placed to decide what is essential for his or her school but it does not alter the fact that many job descriptions are expressed in terms of intentional vagueness. On the positive side, this indirectly signals a belief in the creative skills and good sense of the person who fills the role but on the negative side, it assumes that prized personal qualities can be adapted to different organisational structures, the values of which are absorbed osmotically. Ambiguity of this nature may be a source of strength to those who value their freedom but in a role culture, such freedom is constrained by function and is more likely to lead to uncertainty. This uncertainty appears in the ways work is evaluated, the scope of individual responsibility and scope for advancement as well as the conflict arising from differing perceptions of performance related expectations. Ambiguity of this nature may be implicit in the role or inherited from an individual who undertook certain unspecified duties. Imprecision of this nature may go undetected for years but this would indicate an individual willingness to compromise rather than an element of flexibility built into the role itself. A school manager or head has a potentially overwhelming number of roles to play, some of which can be contradictory and particularly in situations where a degree of executive intervention is called for. Teachers are similarly pressured when their formal classroom role is the opposite of the roles students play with each other or when they are promoted to ADOS or DOS, a move which alters their relationship with colleagues and can be the cause of inter-departmental jealousies. Role overload and role

strain (Handy/Ailken:1990) are predictable consequences of the ambiguity inherent in roles which can lead to certain "coping mechanisms" (Ibid), designed or instinctively introduced to reduce the stress created by the ambiguity. These take the form of measures that "reduce the overload", "relieve the burden" and "escape the problem" but are basically exercises in procrastination. In deferring indefinitely consideration of the underlying causes of role conflict, management relies too heavily on expediency and the good will of individuals at the expense of organisational structure and the co-ordination of functions. Individuals however will tolerate this state of affairs only up to a point. Beyond that point, conflicts mount up and a relatively trivial issue might spark off a major dispute. Alternatively, management may lose the support of the staff in trying to work out what "should" be done and find itself confronted by deep-seated negativity at the way things "are" being done (Everard & Morris: p104). The more entrenched such feeling becomes, the harder it is for managers to seek any via media.

#### CONFLICT MANAGEMENT:

School management is concerned with producing practical results within the context of the school. To this end, the structure of the organisation, the decision making processes and the management style are reflective of the culture that permeates the organisation. In the same way, the management of conflict reveals the extent to which the mechanisms in place are capable of resolving conflict when it arises. Theory X and theory Y views of the nature of work also relate to contrasting styles of management. In brief, the former is based on the premise that work is "inherently distasteful" and outlines a management style that is interventionist and co-ercive. Theory Y, on the other hand, describes work as natural and enjoyable and characterises managers who value creativity and the benefits derived from greater autonomy among employees. In schools, teachers who subscribe to the former theory in their classrooms do not necessarily respond favourably to heads of department or head teachers who are also inclined to uphold the same theory. Similarly, managers who would like to see theory Y in practice throughout the school could encounter resistance from those members of staff who see it as an encroachment on their territory and a challenge to their beliefs.

When White, Martin et al argue that management style affects the tone of the whole school (Ibid), they overlook the possibility of new management and its "new" style being forced to submit before the vested interests of the incumbent workforce.

Therefore, management needs to be based on the principle that organisations are not mechanical but organic and consequently, that conflict can arise between the desire for effective autonomy (or empowerment) and the need for organisational control or the introduction of limitations on autonomy. Although it may not always be possible to achieve total harmony in management and teaching styles, it is important to recognise the relationship between them. Under the British Council's "English Language Schools Recognition Scheme", inspection of management and administration is as central to the validation procedure as inspection of academic management, teaching and resources. In view of this, effective management should seek to retain the operational integrity necessary to administrate while striving to show that the organisation is in control as opposed to a group of people empowered to control others. Management in the context of education is concerned with people and ideas which means that there must be some allowance made for the volatile and unstable nature of group and individual behaviour in the overall aims of greater systemisation and efficiency. At the same time, it needs to be remembered that an element of divide and rule can never be totally excluded from the managerial armoury for the simple reason that management is duty bound to try and resolve conflict. With this in mind, I would like to consider management strategies.

#### COMMUNICATION AND NEGOTIATION

Conflict tends to be perpetuated tactically as the causes of it lead to a hardening of attitudes and the distortion of information. When individual or group energy is channelled into the denigration of others, there is a corresponding decline in the overall productivity and efficiency of the organisation. As noted by Storey (1989), productivity cannot be measured solely in terms of financial ratios, investment and technical innovation: in his analysis of low and high productivity, the way human effort is managed is critical to the long term success of any operation. Consequently, a good

manager needs to respond to the ways in which conflict may appear initially as dissatisfaction and increase to a complaint and then a grievance. We have already considered the possible causes of such feeling but management cannot afford to meet tactically developed conflict with confrontational tactic. A more strategic approach is required, one that either seeks to turn conflict into "fruitful competition or purposeful argument " (Handy:1985) or failing that, strives to control it. For example, in an inter-departmental conflict over resources or space, mutual suspicions should be directed away from personal attacks to ways in which inter-departmental collaboration can correct an organisational weakness. As such, the organisation is seen to benefit from the discussion undertaken and its employees profit from it. Should this fail, a manager may have to intervene to control the conflict and if necessary, use his role to arbitrate. This is most effective when the conflict is apparent and specific but an alternative strategy involves "boxing the problem" in situations where conflict is not only predictable but recurrent: this strategy could be used to defuse rivalries on both an inter and intra-departmental level. Rigid departmental demarcation is both the cause and result of conflicting interests and such a strategy recognises the obstacle it presents to effective co-ordination while seeking to avoid the impression of favouring one side more than the other. Above all, as Everard & Morris argue (Ibid), managers need to evaluate all aspects of the problem and this obliges them to "helicopter" above conflicting perspectives in order to focus attention on common goals. An element of "score settling" is bound to enter the conflict resolving process and management should acknowledge this primal tendency. More importantly, its expression can enable parties to a dispute to focus more clearly on future achievement and be less preoccupied with past frictions. Clearing the air in this way is not as trite a suggestion as it might first appear.

However, communication alone is not really a satisfactory way of resolving conflict. Although it is a vital preliminary step, it does not itself constitute a mechanism for conflict resolution but helps in the establishment of an atmosphere that is amenable to negotiation. At its best, communication can clear up a misunderstanding and prevent conflict but at its worst, it gives the parties to a dispute the opportunity of confirming their suspicions

of each other and becoming further entrenched in their views. In short, communication is not a strategy because it lacks the power to control the process of conflict management, rendering managers ill-equipped to negotiate in the interest of the organisation.

Dealing with conflict by domination has the advantage of being quick but is essentially a tactical response to a situation the management feels has gone on too long or has got out of hand. It also betrays a profound misunderstanding of both the issues involved and the depth of feeling among the interested parties. Adair (Effective Leadership:1988) stresses the importance of self-control in delicate negotiations and argues that although the "...capacity for justified anger is important.." bad temper can be as much a sign of fear and anxiety as impatience and intolerance. Therefore, hostile domination can easily be construed as a sign of weakness, not merely intransigence and if pursued in lieu of a strategy, could unite the conflicting groups against the management. Domination may also take the form of scrupulous adherence to rules and regulations. This is justifiable in situations where unpopular actions have to be taken to avert a crisis or to deal with an emergency. Moreover, managers must reserve the right to say "No" when it is apparent that the other side is being obstructive or refuses to listen to reason but the air of desperation that hangs over such action indicates a disparity between the concern for results and the concern for relationships. If there is a one-sided management strategy, problems that occur can only be dealt with tactically; expediency in place of efficiency and effectiveness.

In his essay "Conflict and Conflict Management" (Dunnette:1975), K. Thomas devised a model that incorporated the dimensions of co-operation and assertion. The latter is distinguished from aggression in that the "legitimate" needs of the conflicting parties are taken into account in order to reach a negotiated settlement. Represented in the form of a grid, the two dimensions produce five management styles, the last at a central point where the other four meet. Everard & Morris changed the dimensions to a low/high scale indicating the concern for results and concern for relationships in conflict management. The management styles are of a fighting, avoiding, smoothing, problem solving or compromising nature but it is significant that whereas Thomas regards assertiveness on the management's part to be the best guarantee of success

in negotiation, Everard & Morris' model emphasises a concern for results as central to conflict resolution. In prioritizing the results, management has a role by virtue of its integral part in the organisational whole. In other words, ELT management, according to Everard & Morris rests upon a belief that conflict "involves" management rather than just requiring it to "intervene" and "settle" where necessary. Thomas' model though, tends to view management as essentially "above" the actual cause of conflict yet also interventionist in the sense that its aims are synonymous with the organisation's aims. Employees are seen to serve those aims and are, in effect "subordinated" to the organisation.

Avoidance of conflict does have a part to play in management strategy if tempers are so frayed that a respite seems advisable. Furthermore, some issues may be so trivial that to ignore them is the best way of ensuring they disappear in the fulness of time. A head of department may adopt such a strategy when it becomes apparent that he is not empowered to resolve the conflict or realises that others are better suited to the task. However, it can also entail infuriating procrastination of a type that betrays an absence of resolution and a dearth of ideas. In this respect, it is hard to accept it as a managerial strategy because the results are likely to include an increase in stress levels and an accelerated breakdown in communications.

A smoothing or accommodating style is reminiscent of a desire to be all things to all men and its success depends on the willingness of all parties to co-operate. However, agreement of this sort might well be a false consensus, either because no party has stated its real needs or because the air of co-operation leads one side to pursue a problem solving approach on the understanding that the other side is similarly inclined. The false consensus can result in recriminations of the "why didn't you tell us?" or "..but I thought we'd agreed..." variety.

The problem solving or collaborative style ensures the maximum concern for results and a high concern for the mutual satisfaction of others. This approach could be used to tackle not only the cause but the source of conflict in situations where the quality of the decision is of paramount importance

and the issues cannot be compromised. However, it can also be time consuming and maybe less effective in producing a speedy result than a more compromising style which, at least, seeks to explore middle ground. Although this style errs towards expediency, it can create the conditions in which a problem solving style would be more creative. If conflicting groups accept the parameters of compromise and the pressures that necessitate it (examination preparation, school inspection etc), there should be a greater willingness to bury differences until they can be properly dealt with at a later date. This, in essence, is the aim of negotiation rather than communication. Its rationale derives from an understanding that management should always try to direct conflict to a super-ordinate goal or strive to redirect conflicting group goals towards total organisational effectiveness. This point was well made by Anthea Millett, chief executive of the Teacher Training Agency in a recent article in the TES. Arguing in favour of the NVQH, she wrote:

Leadership of a school, like leadership of any organisation, is to do with galvanising the organisation to achieve its ends. This is not to relegate the importance of management, but simply to recognise that leadership involves more than good management skills. (TES:21/6/96)

In giving due attention to qualities of leadership, it is clear that good management and (in this discussion) the capacity to negotiate effectively are skills that only good leaders can bring to bear on the resolution of conflict. Personal charisma is an asset but organisational integrity is dependent on more than the "troubleshooting" brilliance of one or two individuals.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS:

I would argue that no one management style will suit each and every conflict situation; nor can manifestations of conflict be attributed to a single source of underlying conflict. Managers are faced with conflict resolving options, the feasibility of which tends to be circumscribed by the organisational structure and culture they operate within. Although I would maintain that a realistic distinction can be made between tension and conflict, this is not to underestimate the danger of one degenerating into the other.

Management must never overlook or minimize the human factor in either the structure or the culture of the organisation and equally, it has an obligation to all involved to co-ordinate individual and group activity to the super-ordinate goals of the organisation. With an awareness of the economic and psychological causes of conflict, management must adopt a strategy that combines the assertiveness associated with leadership and the negotiating skills of the team worker. Underpinning both is the responsibility to control the conflict and to create the most appropriate conditions for its resolution.

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