CHAPTER 10 - CONFLICT

OBJECTIVES

Much of this chapter is based on the premise that students are likely to have oversimplified and emotionally driven ideas about conflict. For example, conflict often conjures up images of arguments, fights, and wars in which the parties involved are actively confronting each other anywhere from the conference table to the battlefield. On the emotional level, conflict is typically felt in a negative tone, considered to be perhaps unnecessary and likely harmful.

In reality, there is much more to conflict. It consists of a series of stages that provide a much broader view of it. It is presented in this chapter as a process, rather than solely as a confrontational event. Another objective is to have the student view conflict as a more common and natural event that need not be approached with aversion and tension when it occurs. Students generally need to know more about how conflict gets started, how natural it is human affairs, and how it can even be viewed in constructive terms. The broader view and the improved attitudes toward conflict are used as a basis for expanding the students' repertoire for coping with conflict.

A final objective is covered in the section on diagnosing conflict. This further develops the theme that conflict is a phenomenon that has multiple causes and is subject to multiple influences. The final objective is to examine the types of conflict resolution, and managerial techniques for handling it in the organizational setting.

KEY POINTS

Although conflict is not always severe, it is common in organizations because of the countless places where people interact and are interdependent on one another. This point of interaction and interdependency are where cooperation is needed, but where conflict typically arises As a process, conflict has antecedent conditions and causes, perceptual and feeling elements, manifest behavior, resolution or suppression reactions, and an aftermath. Its arousal and resolution are often conditioned by the past history of the parties involved. It is important to understand that while some conflict is preventable, most of it is inevitable. Furthermore, some conflict is a sign of organizational health and vitality, an indication that employees are actively and appropriately doing their jobs. An example is when units such as sales, research, and production pursue their own goals among which then translate naturally into tensions these divisions.

There are innumerable causes and antecedents to conflict. Some are rooted in characteristics of individuals, others in situational forces, and still others in the design of complex organizations. Many of these causes and antecedents are not preventable, but can be anticipated as a natural and even desirable consequence of interactions and interdependencies common to organizational life.

Diagnosing conflict is an important component of developing a managerial response to conflict.

Conflict can be considered to have at least 7 dimensions each of which can contribute to the difficulty or ease of resolving the conflict. It is important that students understand this multi-dimensional view of conflict and develop an appreciation for its usefulness as a diagnostic tool.

Reactions to conflict vary widely. Some parties avoid it or give in to the other party. Others prefer to compromise or compete. Less often, the parties may choose to collaborate to find mutually beneficial solutions. Each style of reaction has its own particular uses, and each style creates its own problems if a party overuses it or uses it too little. Familiarity with different styles and flexibility in using them provides a wider repertoire for coping with conflict. The collaborative styles, however, call for particular attention because it demands attitudes and skills that are not commonly held.

The styles also reflect various strategies for conflict resolution. These and other practices can be used to both prevent and approach conflict when it arises. A variety of managerial strategies include goal setting. Formalization practices where possible, reward and resource allocation system design, communication techniques, and improved assignments of personnel. Special roles and structures can also be utilized: Liaisons, integrators, arbitrators and mediators, ombudsmen, and the redesign of units. There are also several resolution techniques that include negotiating and bargaining, and special mutual-gains methods such as the integrative decision technique and principled negotiation.

TOPICAL OUTLINE

The nature of conflict
  Conflict as a process
  The role of history in conflict
  Viewpoints on conflict
What triggers conflict?
  Individual characteristics
  Situational conditions
  Organizational conditions
Diagnosing conflict
  The issue in question
  The size of the stakes
  The interdependence of parties
  The continuity of the interaction
  The leadership
  The involvement of third parties
  The perceived progress of the conflict
Conflict reaction styles
  Avoiding
  Accommodating
  Competing
  Compromising
  Collaborating
  Style flexibility: Overuse and underuse
Improving organizational response to conflict
  Setting superordinate goals
  Reducing ambiguities and jurisdictional disputes
  Improving policies, procedures and rules
  Reallocating or adding resources
  Modifying communications
  Rotating personnel
  Changing reward systems
  Providing training
Summary

KEY CONCEPTS

Accommodating
Antecedent conditions of conflict
Arbitration
Avoiding
Bargaining
Collaborating
Competing
Compromising
Conflict
Conflict management
Confrontation
Manifest conflict
Mediation
Negotiating
Perceived conflict
Positive-sum interdependence
Principled negotiation
Zero-sum interdependence

EXERCISES

A. Exercise: Conflict Handling Style

Suppose you differ with someone. For each activity listed, indicate how often you do them, by circling U (usually), S (sometimes), or R (rarely).

1. I explore our differences, not backing down, but not imposing my view either.	U	S	R
2. I disagree openly, then invite more discussion about our differences.	U	S	R
3. I look for a mutually satisfactory solution.	U	S	R
4. Rather than let the other person make a decision without my input, I make sure I am heard and also that I hear the other out.	U	S	R
5. I agree to a middle ground rather than look for a completely satisfying solution.	U	S	R
6. I admit I am half wrong rather than explore our differences.	U	S	R
7. I have a reputation for meeting a person halfway.	U	S	R
8. I expect to express about half of what I really want to say.	U	S	R
9. I give in totally, rather than try to change another's opinion.	U	S	R
10. I put aside any controversial aspects of an issue.	U	S	R
11. I agree early on, rather than argue about a point.	U	S	R
12. I give in as soon as the other party becomes emotional about an issue.	U	S	R
13. I try to win the other person over.	U	S	R
14. I work to come out victorious, no matter what.	U	S	R
15. I never back away from a good argument.	U	S	R
16. I would rather win than end up compromising.	U	S	R

Now, total your choices as follows. Give yourself 5points for Usually, 3 points for Sometimes, and 1 point for Rarely. Then total your score for each set of statements grouped as follows:

        Set A: Items 1-16   Set C: Items 5-8
        Set B: Items 9-12   Set D: Items 1-4

You must treat each set of items separately. A score of 17 or above on any set is considered high; scores of 12-16 are moderately high; scores of 8-11 are moderately low and scores of 7 or less are considered low.
        Sets A, B, C, and D represent different conflict-resolution strategies.

        A = Forcing: I win, you lose
        B = Accommodation: I lose, you win
        C = Compromise: Both you and I win some and lose some
        D = Collaboration: Both you and I win

Everything has a basic underlying conflict-handling style. Your highest scores on this exercise indicate the strategies you rely on most.

Source: Adapted from Von Der Embse (1987) and printed from Macmillan Publishing Co.

B. CONFLICT STYLES: SELF DIAGNOSIS

Taken alone or used in conjunction with other exercises, it is always a good experience for students to diagnose their personal styles of preferences for dealing with conflict. There are a number of additional instruments available which cannot be duplicated here or otherwise used without permission, but are well worth consideration.

1. Conflict Mode Instrument by K.W. Thomas and R.W. Kilman. Available from Xicom, Tuxedo, N.Y. These are expensive per copy, but contain a complete diagnostic plus implications for use, overuse and underuse of styles.

2. Conflict Managment Survey by Jay Hall. Available from Teleometrics Int'l, P.O. Box 314, The Woodlands, TX 77380.

3. M.A. Rahim has a 35 item instrument described in his Academy of Managment Journal article "A Measure of Styles of Handling Interpersonal Conflict" (June 1983, p. 368-376).

4. the Organizational Communication Conflict Instrument (OCCI) Form B by L.L. Putnam and C. Wilson, Sage Publications, Inc.

5. Sondak, A. has an instrument in "What's Your Conflict Barometer?" Supervisory Management, 1990, May.

C. The Ugli Orange Case

This case represents a situation in which two people negotiate over a shipment of exotic oranges. The roles for Roland and Jones state that one of them requires the oranges for the rind and the other for the juice. The key is to see whether (and how) pairs of negotiators for the oranges discover that they can share the shipment and have no conflict at all.

Procedure: Have one third of the class receive the role for Roland, one third receive the role for Jones, and one third prepare to take the role of observer/recorder of the interaction between Jones and Roland.

After students have read their roles, form the class into thirds (Jones-Roland-Observer) and let the discussion begin and run 10 or more minutes or until most pairs have reached some kind of a resolution.

Proceed to record the solutions and for each type of solution, have the reporters and role players describe the behaviors that led to the outcome. Discuss the implications of such behaviors in terms of questions such as the following:

1. What conflict styles did the parties use?
2. What were the effects of such styles?
3. Were there some critical turning points in the discussion?
4. What techniques from Principled Negotiation or Integrative Decision Making are useful here?
5. Would a third party be useful in this case?

ROLE FOR ROLAND--UGLI ORANGE CASE

You are Dr. P.W. Roland. You work as a research biologist for a pharmaceutical firm. The firm is under contract with the US government to do research on methods to combat enemy uses of biological warfare.

Recently several World War II experimental nerve gas bombs were moved from the US to a small island just off the US coast in the Pacific. In the process of transporting them two of the bombs developed a leak. The lead is presently controlled but government scientists believe that the gas will permeate the bomb chambers within two weeks. They know of no method of preventing the gas from getting into the atmosphere and spreading to other islands, and very likely to Los Angeles as well. If this occurs, it is likely that several thousands of people will incur serious brain damage or die.

You've developed a synthetic vapor which will neutralize the nerve gas if it is injected into the bomb chamber before the gas leaks out. The vapor is made with a chemical taken from the rind of the Ugli orange, a very rare fruit. Unfortunately, only 4000 of these oranges were produced this season.

You've been informed, on good evidence, that a Mr. R.H. Domingo, a fruit exporter in South America, is in possession of 3000 Ugli oranges. The chemicals from the rinds of this number of oranges would be sufficient to neutralize the gas if the serum is developed and injected efficiently. You have also been informed that the rinds of these oranges are in good condition.

You have also been informed that Dr. J.W. Jones is also urgently seeking purchase of Ugli oranges and he is aware of Mr. Domingo's possession of the 3000 available. Dr. Jones works for a firm with which your firm is highly competitive. There is a great deal of industrial espionage in the pharmaceutical industry. Over the years, your firm and Dr. Hones' firm have sued each other form violations of industrial espionage laws and infringement of patent rights several times. Litigation on two suits is still in process.

The Federal government has asked your firm for assistance. You've been authorized by your firm to approach Mr. Domingo to purchase the 3000 Ugli oranges. you have been told he will sell them to the highest bidder. Your firm has authorized you to bid as high as $250,000 to obtain the rind of the oranges.

Before approaching Mr. Domingo, you have decided to talk to Dr. Jones to influence him so that he will not prevent you from purchasing the oranges.

ROLE FOR JONES–UGLI ORANGE CASE

You are Dr. John W. Jones, a biological research scientist employed by a pharmaceutical firm. You have recently developed a synthetic chemical useful for curing and preventing Rudosen. Rudosen is a disease contracted by pregnant women. If not caught in the first four weeks of pregnancy the disease causes serious brain, eye, and ear damage to the unborn child. Recently there has been an outbreak of Rudosen in your state and several thousand women have contracted the disease. You have found, with volunteer victims, that your recently developed synthetic serum, cures Rudosen in its early stages. Unfortunately, the serum is made from the juice of the Ugli orange, which is a very rare fruit. Only a small quantity (approximately 40000) of these oranges were produced last season. No additional Ugli oranges will be available until next season, which will be too late to cure the present Rudosen victims.

You've demonstrated that your synthetic serum, is in no way harmful to pregnant women. Consequently, there are no side effects. The Food and Drug Administration has approved of the production and distribution of the serum as a cure for Rudosen. Unfortunately, the present outbreak was unexpected and your firm had not planned on having the compound serum available for six months. Your firm holds the patent on the synthetic serum and is expected to be a highly profitable product when it is generally available to the public.

You have recently been informed, on good evidence, that Mr. R.H. Domingo, a South American fruit importer, is in possession of 3000 Ugli oranges in good condition. If you could obtain the juice of all 3000 you would be able to both cure the present victims and provide sufficient inoculation for the remaining pregnant women in the state. No other state currently has a Rudosen threat.

You have recently been informed that Dr. P.W. Roland is also urgently seeking Ugli orange and is also aware of Mr. Domingo's possession of the 3000 available. Dr. Roland is employed by a competitor pharmaceutical firm. He has been working on biological warfare research for the past several years. There is a great deal of industrial espionage in the pharmaceutical industry. Over the past several years, Dr. Roland's firm and your firm have sued each other for infringement of patent rights and espionage law violations several times.

You've been authorized by your firm to approach Mr. Domingo to purchase the 3000 Ugli oranges. You have been told he will sell them to the highest bidder. Your firm has authorized you to bid as high as $250,000 to obtain the juice of the 3000 available oranges.

Before approaching Mr. Domingo you have decided to talk to Dr. Roland to influence him so that he will not prevent you from purchasing the oranges.

Exploring A Current Issue

Almost any issue of interest to students can be used as a basis for a classroom conflict resolution experience. Students can, given an issue, engage in one or more of the following:

1. Discuss various sides of the issue as a total class

2. Be divided into the "sides" or "parties" in conflict over the issue and asked to present or argue their point of view.

3. Divided into the sides or parties and asked to resolve a particular disagreement

4. Generate a number of collaborative, win-win solutions for an issue, that meet the needs of the parties involved.

5. Diagnose the conflict using dimensions provide in Figure 10.4

Any of a number of issues can be used in such an exercise. For example:

1. Any current campus dispute or problem

2. Gender conflicts over pay or promotion differentials

3. Line vs. staff conflicts in functional organizations

4. Whether people tested HIV positive should be differentially treated in sports or the workplace.

5. Role requirement conflicts in dual-career couples

6. Conflicts between students and professors over course requirements

7. Any current issue from the media that involves a dispute of some kind (labor disputes, zoning disputes etc.)

CHAPTER 10 STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Define and describe the various stages in the conflict process.

The five stages in the conflict process include (1) antecedent conditions that cause or precede a conflict episode such as an overt act of aggression or a subtle condition, such as scarce resources; (2) Perceived conflict, when awareness occurs; (3) manifest conflict occurs when the parities react to the conditions; (4) conflict resolution or suppression may result from reactions to the conflict behavior exhibited by the parties; and (4) aftermath in which the parties end up with any of a variety of perceptions or feelings ranging from peace and trust to tension, anxiety, or planning for a renewed confrontation.

2. Describe a work situation you are familiar with in which you identify (a) preventable conflict conditions, (b) inevitable conflict conditions, and (c) conditions where conflict is a sign of organizational health and effectiveness.

Example situations where conflict is preventable are where employees have poorly defined roles, where information is insufficiently communicated, and where goal setting is either not done or done without affecting clarity and coordination in a positive way. Preventable conflict occurs also when resources are kept in unnecessary scarcity.

Some inevitable conflict conditions arise out of individual differences in needs, beliefs, values, attitudes, and personality, and in places in the organization where interactions and interdependencies exist. Other conditions include when scarce resources cannot be duplicated or made abundant, and when status and power differences are in existence. It is generally impossible to eliminate all conflict through the use of policies, procedures, and rules, so some conflict will inevitably arise out of the absence or ambiguity of these.

Conflict can easily be a positive sign whenever necessary specialization and differentiation create orientations that are proper for intra-unit effectiveness but create tensions between units. The classical case is the relationship between sales, production, and research divisions. Such conflict is usually triggered when new products are introduced, or when other changes (e.g., rush orders) are imposed on one division by the actions of another.

3. Show how individual characteristics and situational factors operate as antecedents or causes of conflict.

Regarding individual characteristics, a number of factors can cause conflict; values, attitudes, beliefs, needs, personality, perceptions, and judgments can all contribute. For example, values and needs for independence may engender conflict when controls or other interdependencies are imposed. Values and perceptions of unions and management often clash. Also, misjudgment (such as attribution errors) may trigger conflict.

Many situational conditions can cause conflict, such as (1) interdependency and need to interact, (2) status differences (3) communication between the parties, or (4) ambiguous responsibilities and jurisdictions.

4. Cite five organization structure characteristics and show how each one contributes to the likelihood of conflict.

Five organization structure characteristics, and how each one might cause conflict are (1) specialization and differentiation which give people different priorities, interests, and orientations to such things as time, interpersonal relations, formality of structure, and goals; (2) task interdependence, especially sequential and reciprocal forces employees to depend on each other and when one party fails, conflict may erupt; (3) unclear or conflicting goals can be the basis for many disagreements over resources, ends sought, or priorities such as where productivity conflicts with safety; (4) clearly where there are scarce resources, conflict can arise out of competition for them; and (5) multiple authority and influence can put people into role conflict such as trying to resolve incompatible demands from one or more sources. Other organizational factors include (6) policies, procedures and rules, and (7) reward systems that foster conflict.

5. Describe the five major styles of reacting to conflict. For each one, show how and where it is particularly useful.

The five major styles include (1) avoiding where the person simply ignores or moves away from a disagreement; (2) accommodating or giving in to the wishes of another person; (3) competing or pursuing ones interest at the expense of the other party; (4) compromising or trying to find a middle ground through trading or bargaining; and (5) collaborating, which involves working together to meet the needs of both parties.

Avoiding can be wise when the issues are not significant and the costs of conflict may well outweigh the benefits. It also is indicated when there is little chance of success, or as a way to buy time, or when the wrong issue is involved. Accommodating can be used when you know you are wrong, or as a sign of good will, when the issue is more important to the other party. It can also help train subordinates when a boss gives in and lets them learn from their own preference for action. Competing is useful when you feel you are right, or there is little time for discussion, and when unpopular decisions must be made. It is also a way to protect against being exploited. Compromising may be useful when collaboration or competition fails. It also is useful when diametrically opposed positions exist between parties of equal power, where a middle ground must be found. It also can save time relative to collaborating or competing. Collaborating should be used on important issues where the parties have a major stake in the outcomes, and compromise can be costly. When relationships need to be strengthened, collaboration can help the parties appreciate each other's views.

6. Which is your preferred and backup style of conflict resolution? When do you switch from your preferred to your backup style?

Here the students will select their backup style and justify switching to it when their primary style fails. For example, a person may switch to competing when pressed out of avoiding or when the other party refuses to compromise or collaborate on an important issue. Another example would be to switch to accommodating when you discover you can't win and the relationships with the other party needs strengthening. Many other examples are possible here.

7. What are the implications of overusing a particular style of conflict resolution?

The problem of overusing a particular style, in general, may reflect a lack of flexibility or versatility in resolving conflict. It may also mean lack of skill in using alternate styles. Particular effects of overusing each of the styles are listed in Table 14.1 in the text.

8. Which style(s) do you rarely use in dealing with conflict? What are the risks or costs of not using the style(s) enough?

This question asks students to reexamine their least preferred style and to evaluate the consequences of an underused of a style. For example, some students may rarely or never avoid getting into conflict situations. They might argue that they should continue to approach rather than avoid when the stakes are high and they will lose by not getting involved. However, they might discover that avoidance can pay off when their personal risk is low, and avoidance will buy time or create a cooling off period. Similar analyses can be applied for any unused style.

9. Define and differentiate between the roles of arbitrators and mediators.

Arbitration involves the use of a third party in conflict resolution. Arbitrators hear both sides of the conflict and actually make decisions that bind both parties, who agree to do so in advance of inviting an arbitrator in. Mediators on the other hand are usually not empowered to make a binding decision, but rather lead the parties through a conflict resolution process, and help them to arrive at a solution. They can help relieve tensions, make suggestions, or otherwise facilitate resolution.

10. What are the four major guidelines suggested by the principled negotiation technique? Give an example of how to use each guideline.

The four major guidelines of the principled negotiation technique and how to use each one are (1) separate the people from the problem by avoiding blame, listening, and stating the problem without denigrating the other party; (2) focus on interests, not positions, by having people express their needs, but not insist on their solution or attack the other party's position; (3) invent options for mutual gain by jointly generating alternative solutions without prematurely evaluating them; and (4) insist on objective criteria such as fairness, workability, and durability

of solutions.

11. Describe five organizational practices that might help to prevent or reduce the severity of conflict.

Five organizational practices might include (1) setting superordinate goals, (2) reducing ambiguities and jurisdictional disputes, (3) improving policies, procedures, and rules, (4) reallocating or adding to resources, and (5) modifying communications. Other practices include (6) rotating personnel through different units, (7) altering reward systems, (8) using liaison roles or integrator, (9) relocate or recombine units, (10) using ombudsmen, and (11) redesign the organization structure.

ETHICAL, DIVERSITY AND GLOBAL ISSUES

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A Question of Ethics:
Conflicts of Interest

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Managers of organizations that have significant employee diversity encounter conflicts stemming from differences in individual beliefs and values. One source of conflict agreeing upon what behavior is acceptable to an organization–especially when that behavior has ethical implications.

One issue that is often discussed in today's global business environment concerns conflicts of interest. Consider the following work place behaviors and decide which you feel are unethical behaviors.

- A senior Vice president for Information Technology takes a free golf vacation as part of a sales pitch by an international supplier who wants him to agree to a multi-million dollar contract.
- A University employee uses her University office computer to set up a web site for a charity where she volunteers much of her personal her time.
- A salesperson for a firm that sells electrical supplies takes a potential customer who is a senior manager from a major building supply warehouse chain, to dinner and spends over $100 per person on the meal.
- A U.S computer software firm buys thousands of dollars worth of computer equipment and gives it to an international company so that the company can avoid paying significant import taxes on the equipment. As a result, the international company purchases a great deal of software from the firm. The legal office for the software firm says that the firm has not broken any laws but that the international software firm is clearly violating laws of their country.

Each of these scenarios could be considered unethical depending on your individual perspective. Others may argue that they are a normal practices of doing business and that organizations have no role in playing moral police in respect to activities of their customers or suppliers.

Differences of opinion on ethical issues like these are a source of conflict in the work place. To cope with conflicts of interest managers should insure that there is a written policy in place that deals with these issues and that all employees are aware of those standards. Employees should be trained to ask first, when potential ethical conflicts arise.

Diversity Issues:
So You've Increased the Diversity – Now How Do You Decrease the Conflict?

Most successful organizations are increasing the diversity of their workforce in an effort to insure they are attracting and retaining the most talented employees available regardless of race, gender, religion or national origin. One impact of this trend is that this diversity of cultures leads to increased diversity of beliefs, attitudes, values and behaviors. These differences, if not properly managed, can increase organizational conflict.

An example of this issue comes from 3Com Corporation's factory in Chicago, Illinois. 3Com employees 1200 people in their factory and those employees represent a wide variety of cultures. 3Com employees speak 20 different languages and many have difficulty with English. The result is that communication is often difficult and this leads to many misunderstandings. The language barriers often provide challenges for individuals who provide training to 3Coms employees. As a result, 3Com relies heavily on pictures and drawings to provide directions to employees on procedure such as operating equipment. According to managers, pointing is also a frequently used method of communication.

Other issues that often lead to conflict at 3Com are customs such as when to say "please" or "thank you". Employees from some cultures seldom say please and this often leads to hurt feelings. An additional source of conflict stems from the natural cliques that form among people from the same countries or cultures. These cliques are evident in the lunch room as well as on the factory floor where workers have some autonomy in their groupings. Within these sub-groups, members from the same cultures revert to speaking in their natural language, an understandable tendency, but one that leads to concerns by co-workers who do not understand the language. As a general practice, a language etiquette had developed so that if an outsider of the group is present, everyone tries to use English to communicate.

Despite an organization's efforts to increase the diversity of their work force, insuring the success of an effort to increase diversity requires active managerial involvement to insure this new diverse work force gets along. Overcoming differences in values, attitudes behaviors and language are an increasing managerial challenge.

Source: Adapted from Aeppel (1998)

Global Focus:
Conflict Across Cultures

Given that individual characteristics are a product of socialization, we would naturally expect many cross-cultural differences on how people deal with conflict. Different styles of reacting to conflict are probably found more frequently in some culture than others. When organizations have international operations and plants in other countries, they must be aware of such cultural differences since a major aspect of culture is tolerance of and reactions to conflict. In Japan, there is far less toleration of open conflict than in the United States. People also react to others and attempt to gain control over their situation in different ways, a result of differences in child-rearing practices in the two cultures [Kojima, 1984]. The Japanese attempt to deal with the issue of control over others with a style of accommodation, whereas the US culture emphasizes competing or direct confrontation style [Weisz, Rothbaum, & Blackburn, 1984].

In a recent study, comparisons were made between the United States, Japan, China, Korea, and Taiwan [Ting-Toomey, Gao, Trubisky, Yang, Kim, Lin, & Nishids, 1991]. The researchers examined similarities and differences in how conflict is approached and resolved. Asian cultures are more likely to value group goals and responsibilities than they are to pursue individualistic needs. China, Korea, and Taiwan for example, showed highest concern for the self-esteem and self-image of the other party, and to avoid embarrassing or humiliating them. They gave others the opportunity to "save face" more so than in the United States, and are more likely to avoid conflict. In the US, there is a stronger tendency to dominate the other party rather than avoid or accommodate. In such individualistic cultures, people show more concern for preserving their own self-esteem, which is the case for both the United States and Japan. Though more competitive, it is interesting that the individualistic emphasis tends also to foster more collaborative behavior. By comparison, Asian cultures are more likely to give in or accommodate the other party.

CASE: ZACK ELECTRICAL PARTS

Bob Byrne's ear was still ringing. Byrne was director of the Audit Staff at Zack Electrical Parts. He had just received a phone call from Jim Whitmore, the plant manager. Whitmore was furious. He had just read a report prepared by the Audit Staff concerning cost problems in his Assembly Department.

Whitmore, in a loud voice, said he disagreed with several key sections of the report. He claimed that had he known more about the Audit Staff's work, he could have shown them facts that denied some of their conclusions. He also asked why the report was prepared before he had a chance to comment on it. But what made him particularly angry was that the report had been distributed to all the top managers at Zack. He felt top management would get a distorted view of his Assembly Department, if not his whole plant.

Byrne ended the call by saying he'd check into the matter. So he called in Kim Brock, one of his subordinates who headed the audit team for the study in question. Brock admitted that she had not had a chance to talk to Whitmore before completing and distributing the report. Nor had she really had a chance to spend much time with Dave Wells who headed the Assembly Department.

But Brock claimed it wasn't her fault. She had tried to meet with both Whitmore and Wells more than once. She had left phone messages for them. But they always seemed too busy to meet, and were out of town on several occasions when she was available. So she decided she had better complete the report and get it distributed in order to meet the deadline.

That same day, Whitmore and Wells discussed the problem over lunch. Wells was angry, too. He said Brock bugged him to do the study, but her timing was bad. Wells was working on an important assembly area project of his own that was top priority to Whitmore. He couldn't take the time that Brock needed right now. He tried to tell her this before the study began, but Brock claimed she had no choice but to do the audit. Wells remembered, with some resentment, how he couldn't get Brock's help last year when he needed it. But the staff audit group seemed to have plenty of time for the study when he couldn't give it any attention. Whitmore said he'd look into the matter, and agreed that they both had been unnecessarily raked over the coals.

> 1. What were the causes and antecedents of the conflict between the staff audit group and the managers in the plant?
> 2. Describe the conflict that arose in terms of the stages it went through.
> 3. How can staff units work with line managers to minimize such conflict?

Case Discussion: Zack Electrical Parts

1. What were the causes and antecedents of the conflict between the staff audit group and managers in the plant?

Just about all the causes of conflict discussed in the test can occur in line and staff relations:
- Perceptual differences about timing or priorities
- Difficulty in consensus over report content
- Dependence of staff on line for access
- Communication failures
- Power and responsibility ambiguities
- Specialization/differentiation causing different points of view
- Lack of mutual goals
- Scarce staff resources places them at HQ
- Multiple authority and influence
- Lack of policies, procedures, rules

2. Describe the conflict that arose in terms of the stages it went through.

Refer to Figure 10.1 for a description of the stages in the conflict process. First, the antecedent conditions were those discussed in question 1 above. Perceived and felt conflict arose when Whitmore saw the report and disagreed with its content and distribution. Also, these arose when Brock couldn't meet with line personnel, and past resentments emerged from prior inability to get staff help when he needed it. Manifest conflict began when Whitmore angrily called Byrne, and when Wells's anger revealed itself at lunch though not manifested toward the audit group. Thus far in the case, conflict resolution hasn't really begun, but it is not suppressed either. The aftermath obviously also has yet to be determined.

3. How can staff units work with line managers to minimize conflict?

Line/staff conflict can be reduced by (a) establishing mutual projects and priorities, (b) increasing mutual appreciation for each other's situation, (c) increasing staff willingness and availability to help line on what line considers to be their needs, (d) improved policies, procedures, and rules for working together and for mutual approval on the distribution of reports, and (3) perhaps temporary rotation of personnel so that each party gets to see the other's point of view and problems.

More difficult and sophisticated solutions might call for staff being temporarily assigned to a line unit for the duration of a project. More extreme would be to give line full control over the disposition of reports of staff work. Staff people would not be particularly receptive to such policies because of their education, expertise, and rewards, which usually come from top managers. Yet these possibilities may generate interesting reactions from the students.