

Title

**Integral conflict analysis:
A comprehensive quadrant analysis of an organizational conflict**

Abstract

Complex conflicts require integrated approaches. Influenced by Ken Wilber's brilliant synthesis of some of the world's most influential thinkers, including Jurgen Habermas, the authors have developed an integral model of conflict analysis and action. As conflict practitioners and teachers, the authors have found that the integral approach has been helpful in explaining conflict dynamics to clients and is appreciated by our students who can readily grasp the inter-relationships among different conflict theory domains. Additionally, integral analysis allows for more comprehensive responses, thus ensuring greater chances of a successful intervention.

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‘The Diamond Approach’

Introduction

Behind every consultant’s effort to respond to organizational conflict lies a set of assumptions, theories or hypotheses held by the consultant about the origins and choreography of the conflict. These assumptions, theories and hypotheses inform and direct restoration actions (Morgan, 1980, Bolman and Deal, 1991). Morgan believes that metaphors or theories, have unbounded potential to affect social action, and most importantly - they are often beyond conscious awareness (1986, 1980). Practice is never theory free, it is always guided by an image of what one is trying to do and the real issue is whether or not the consultant is aware of the theories guiding the intervention actions. Significantly, the consultant’s assumptions form the frame of reference within which the consultant approaches the organization and, further, create the world that the consultant later “discovers” (Morgan 1980, 1986, see also Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987).

In this essay we outline the development of an integral quadrant model for analysis called The Diamond Approach. This conceptual model offers new ideas for conducting organizational interventions and may expand the assumptions, theories and hypotheses that guide the consultant’s intervention process. This effort explores new ways of seeing and understanding organizations and is an investigation into the consultant’s ontological and epistemological positions, which influence theory development and its application to organizational conflicts.

Consulting as Art

An art critic was reflecting on a painting of a sunset that had been done by Cézanne and commented, “That doesn’t look anything like a sunset.” Thinking for a moment, Cézanne said, “Then you don’t see sunset’s the way that I do.” (Martinez, 1989 in Bolman and Deal, 1991). We have been influenced by Morgan’s notions (1980, 1986) that organizational consultants have relied too much on physical science metaphors of the world and too little on art and their efforts to foster such attributes as quality, commitment, and creativity. Art, we acknowledge, is not a replacement for engineering but an enhancement, a different reflection of how to see the world of organizing.

Through the application of his or her art, the consultant allows for emotion, subtlety, and ambiguity to surface in ways that are useful to the organization (Bolman and Deal, 1991, Lang and Taylor, 2000). In a sense the artist-as-consultant interprets the conflict and makes recommendations that are presented in a form that can be felt, understood, and appreciated by others in the organization. Responding to conflict in an organization is often one of artistry, which is neither exact nor precise. The consultant as artist is essential in helping the organization respond to the conflict with actions that will facilitate releasing the untapped individual and collective energies of the organization (Bolman and Deal, 1991).

The Diamond Approach

In The Diamond Approach, four theoretical domains are situated within one model for the assessment of conflict. They are, *the interior of the individual (Leadership)*, *the exterior of the individual (Needs & behaviour)*, *the interior of the collective (Culture or spirit)* and *the exterior of the collective (Teams & social systems)*.

Each approach or quadrant presents a distinctly different perspective of the same conflict, which deepens one's analysis and appreciation of a situation, how it developed, and what remedial courses of action are most likely to succeed. In addition, relationships and linkages between and amongst these approaches further enrich the analysis (Wilber, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999).

Each of the quadrants illuminates a different perspective of a conflict. Conflict theorists and practitioners have often referred to these different perspectives independently. Conflict consultants have generally emphasized a *single* quadrant approach, for example a systems analysis; however, an investigative approach that employs a singular theory domain, or quadrant, is an incomplete research tool because it limits one's capacity to understand, manage, and support the resolution of conflict. The application of a particular theory to understand a conflict, though often offering a valid perspective, is able to only arrive at a part of the truth, as even the notion of what truth is, is often in question. Bolman and Deal (1991) refer to this approach as conceptual pluralism.

The Diamond Approach, an all-quadrant or multi-frame analytical method is anchored in organizational theory development. Other multi-frame analysis models include:

- ◆ Kanter, (1977) opportunity, & power, & numbers
- ◆ Kotter, (1982) Agendas, relationships & networks
- ◆ Kanter (1983), Segmentation, empowerment, power, skills & culture
- ◆ Perrow (1986) Bureaucracy, human relations institutional school & power
- ◆ Birnbaum (1988) Collegial, bureaucratic, political, & anarchic

- ◆ Bolman and Deal (1991) Structural frame, human resource frame, political frame and the symbolic frame
- ◆ Burrell and Morgan (1979) radical humanism, radical structuralism, interpretive sociology & functionalist sociology

Borrowing from the notions of ‘frames’, the Diamond Approach is an integral method of analysis for organizational conflict. In introducing this approach to practice, we suggest that:

- ❖ Each theoretical dimension or facet reflects a unique aspect of conflict,
- ❖ Each facet is relative to, and linked with, the other facets,
- ❖ The special advantage of each facet is reflected in the actions of the disputing parties, and,
- ❖ An integrated understanding of human interactions is essential for successful conflict management.

Just like the proverbial story about the blind men and the elephant, the same conflict assumes distinctly different characteristics depending upon the perspective of the investigator. Equally important, the conflict exists with equivalent legitimacy in all quadrants. When solutions are derived from an integrated analysis, they are more likely to succeed because they take multiple factors into account. The notion of multiple perspectives of the world is not restricted to organizational theory and although there are many pioneers of this analysis method, St Bonaventure, Baldwin, Habermas and Wilber are worth mentioning here.

The Christian mystic St Bonaventure taught that men and women have three modes of attaining knowledge – three eyes; *the eye of flesh*, by which we perceive the

external world; the *eye of reason* by which we attain knowledge of philosophy, logic and of the mind itself and finally, the *eye of contemplation* by which we rise to a knowledge of transcendent realities. The wording may be Christian, however, the three ‘eyes’ are consistent with the approach we are discussing (Wilber 1996).

Baldwin, a distinguished American psychologist defined three modes of knowing as *aesthetic*, *moral* and *scientific* and within each of these domains proposed detailed developmental stages. His contributions influenced the work of Piaget, Kohlberg, Popper and Campbell (Wilber, 1998, 1999)

Habermas, a distinguished German philosopher, has also developed a multi perspective model. His theory of communication (universal pragmatics) serves as an account of the development of the subjective (the aesthetic), intersubjective (the moral) and objective consciousness (the scientific).

Wilber’s integral, all quadrant model is derived from his belief that subjective consciousness – *the Beautiful*, (the aesthetic) does not exist in a vacuum, it is intermeshed within the objective organism and brain – *the True, singular* (the scientific); with nature, social systems and environment – *the True, plural* (the scientific); and with cultural settings and worldviews – *the Good* (the moral). His four quadrants refer to four of the most important dimensions of the Kosmos; the interior and exterior of the individual and of the collective (Wilber, 2000)

The use of a single quadrant analysis of organizations can be traced to the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ news of modernity. The good news was that modernity had differentiated the spheres of art, morals and science and where pre-modern cultures tended to fuse these spheres, modernity individuated them and allowed each to proceed at its own pace, each using its own tools, and each revealing knowledge. The bad news was that modernity’s

differentiation of the value spheres (quadrants) gave way to disassociation, which allowed a powerful and aggressive science to dominate the other spheres thus pushing art and morals (Spirituality) out of any serious consideration in approaching 'reality'. Where modernity had briefly brought differentiation and balance between the different value spheres, science became scientism-the official worldview of modernity (Wilber, 1995, 1996, 1999).

The significance of these three ways of knowing is found in the ascendancy of one 'eye' to the position of speaking for all knowledge - this was the *eye of flesh*, empirical science. Beginning with Galileo and Kempler and culminating with the work of Newton, was the birth of scientism. Wilber (1996) describes it this way:

But within mere decades of Kant, the eye of flesh blinded by Newton's light, thought that it, and it alone was worthy of knowledge. ... It did not just speak for the eye of flesh, but for the eye of mind and for the eye of contemplation as well. ... The scientists tried to force empirical science, with its eye of flesh, to work for all three eyes. (p. 20)

Implications for a case study

In the following pages we present a case study of an organizational conflict and walk through the process of assessment using an integral, all quadrant approach. Each section begins with a brief description of the quadrant, followed by illustrations of the types of data collected with examples of theoretical interpretation and implications for recommendations. Excerpts from our report are used to highlight theory application.

Case study

We were invited to work with teaching and administrative staff members of a school community who were in the midst of a conflict that had been active for over four years. The origins of the conflict were said to have begun with the presentation of an accreditation report commissioned by the school district, in which the school was reported to be lacking in some areas. Some members of staff were disturbed by the findings in the report, and the manner in which the report was presented to them. Around the same time, there were changes in administrative leadership, none of which went smoothly for a variety of reasons.

We decided to begin with an assessment that consisted of interviews with as many staff members as wanted to meet with us. After an open staff meeting in which we outlined our approach, we designed a questionnaire and invited people to meet with us. Forty-four interviewees (a sample size of approximately 70%) volunteered to meet with us in confidential, face-to-face interviews. We conducted the interviews ourselves because we also wanted to use these meetings as opportunities to gain trust and rapport with members of the school, and address any concerns they might have directly. We met with a good cross section of the school employees, from janitors to the principal.

The interviews were very successful, both in terms of gathering information and because they allowed us to begin building trust with individuals. We wrote our report based on data we gleaned in the interviews, secondary sources that we reviewed (school documents, both official and off-the-record), and our personal observations during meetings and other school functions. The report was distributed throughout the school and formed the basis of the interventions that we subsequently conducted during the ensuing year. Informed by our all quadrant analysis, our intervention had a profound

impact on the school community, which, stopped the escalation destructive conflict practices and began the slow process of community healing.

Some of the details of our assessment are presented in the rest of this paper to serve as illustrations of how we applied the Diamond Approach in this organizational conflict. We have removed or changed any information that would identify the school.

The Diamond Approach

Organizational Conflict



Adapted from Ken Wilber, 1999

“Our Spirit”

Introduction

Organization culture refers to the pattern of development reflected in the organization’s system of knowledge, ideology, values, rules and day-to-day rituals. In this sense organizations can be viewed as mini societies that have their own distinctive patterns of shared belief and meaning. An organization may perceive itself as a tightly knit team or family that works together. Another may be driven by a competitive notion that “we’re the best and intend to stay that way.” Still another may be highly fragmented, divided into groups that think about the world in different ways, or that have conflicting aspirations as to what the organization should be (Morgan, 1980).

Defining culture as an emergent process of reality construction allows us to understand particular events, actions, objects, utterances, or situations in ways that are unique to the situation. In turn, the patterns that emerge from observing these elements provide a disciplined basis for deriving meaning about the behaviors in question. Patterns of shared belief and meaning manifest in artifacts and activities ranging from formal operating policies to informal norms of interaction. Understanding organization culture is a subjective, interpretive process that is facilitated through interviews with, and surveys of, personnel at all levels, examination of organizational documents, and through observations of staff interactions. We can understand culture as the hidden curriculum of learning that is present in all organizations.

Sample interview questions and sample analysis in the “Spirit” quadrant

Here are some of the questions that we posed during the interviews, followed by excerpts from our analysis within this theory domain.

- What makes your school special?
- How is this campus different from other, similar schools?
- What is a belief that is shared by your colleagues about your work here?
- What sorts of rituals (meetings, special events, awards) does your school do?
- How would you describe your “daily routine” at the school?
- What are some of the “stories” that are told about your school?
- How does your school approach conflict among faculty?
- How does your school approach conflict among students?
- From your perspective, what does the presence of conflict mean (or indicate) at your school?

Sample analysis

Interpretation of this cultural data is supported by previous research and theoretical development in this quadrant by Argyris and Schon (1978), Bolman and Deal (1991), Coser (1956), Fisher (in Deutsch and Coleman, 2000), Palmer (1998), and Tjosvold (1992). The perspectives offered by each of these researchers not only informed our analysis of this quadrant but, also, each of the recommendations that we made. Illustrating this approach we have included an edited section of our report relating to the work of Tjosvold (1992) and organizational conflict cultures:

“Tjosvold (1992) suggests that conflict is a window to the drama of organizational life. An organization cannot avoid conflict between or among members, nor with outside contacts and groups. When responding to conflict, organizational personnel try to suppress it, avoid it, compete in it, build rules

around it, or work positively with it. Conflict is simply a fact of organizational life and if the organization wants continuing success, it must respond to conflict in ways that use the power of conflict to build, rather than to destroy. An organization's orientation to conflict inevitably influences the quality and types of relationships that members have. Well-managed conflicts can invigorate the organization, become a force for finding common ground, support creative problem solving, and strengthen morale and relationships. It has been well documented that when conflict is poorly managed it becomes costly, both in strict financial terms, and in terms of the quality of relationships within the organization.

Values regarding conflict are always embedded in the prevailing organizational culture, experienced in the overall climate, and witnessed in members' behaviours as they work through the experience of conflict. A positive conflict culture is needed for those organizations that choose to foster constructive communication patterns and the energetic hustle needed for competing in turbulent, fast changing environments.

Tjosvold (1992) sees conflict avoidance and the failure to develop an organization equipped to manage it, not conflict itself, as the problem. Avoiding conflict allows problems to fester, relationships to deteriorate, and problems to go unsolved.

We encourage your school to develop a conflict positive culture. The goal is not to create the absence of conflict in the organization but, rather, to appropriately manage conflict in order to add value to the organization. This means even if we could avoid conflict, we would not want to, for it is in the midst

of experiencing a conflict positive culture that individuals create their future together.

Through our analysis of data collected during the interviews, it is clear that your school has a conflict avoidant culture. Many respondents reported a fear of conflict and stated that whenever they could, they prefer to avoid it. Further, when avoiding has failed to mitigate the impact of the presenting conflict, competition has become the second most favoured approach. Additionally, many faculty reported unsatisfactory outcomes when approaching administration about conflict, and reported a bias in the way that their concerns were heard and acted upon.”

Our analysis of this quadrant (Our Spirit) led to several recommendations related to creating a positive conflict culture. Similarly, we introduced other organizational theory related to creating other features of a healthy school culture.

“Our Teamwork”

Introduction

This element examines the formal rules and informal norms of the organization that guide collegial interactions. The *formal rules* of the organization are often found in policy and procedure manuals and explicitly define behavioural expectations across a wide range of operations, from daily procedures and routines, to expectations about how staff will (or will not) behave with clients. Formal guidelines are usually easy to locate because they are explicit.

Norms are unofficial but powerful operating conventions. They are the tacit, informal protocols that regulate and regularize team behaviour. These norms are not recorded in any visible location, but they have a potent influence on team members' behaviours and interactions. A norm exists when team members accept and implement it regularly, whether or not they do so with conscious intention. In other words, a norm exists only as long as its corresponding behaviour is accurately anticipated and activated with observable consistency. Staff and other personnel are usually only vaguely aware of the implicit norms by which they operate, although they can usually identify them when asked to do so (Berne, 1963, Ofshe, 1973, Robbins, 1989).

Transparent identification of both rules and norms facilitates high levels of group effectiveness across a wide band of behaviour including:

- Conflict
- Communication
- Decision-making
- Creativity and generation of ideas

- Role definition.

Rules and norms are tangible manifestations of culture. They are the expression of beliefs and values that are imbedded within the culture of an organization (Wilber, 1999).

Interview questions and sample analysis in the “Our Teamwork” quadrant

The principal sources of data for this section were the results of a team effectiveness assessment instrument that each respondent was asked to complete during the face-to-face interviews. This instrument gauges the overall effectiveness of the team by asking respondents to rate important aspects of team functioning. Respondents rated these aspects on a seven-point Likert scale, and later we compiled their responses to provide a “birds-eye snapshot” that portrays the overall functioning of the team.

Sample analysis

To illustrate this quadrant (Teamwork) we have included an edited excerpt from our report:

“Here is a summary of the self-reported data. Please bear in mind that these compiled comments relate exclusively to the *team’s* ability to function as an entire group, and do not reflect the behaviours of isolated individuals.

- ◆ Most respondents do not believe that the direction, mission and vision of the school are meaningfully connected to their work. Two thirds scored the team at poor, very poor or extremely poor in this category.

- ◆ The team is ineffective at regular self-correction, learning from shared experience and taking shared action based on regular self-assessment. More than 75% of the respondents scored mid range or below.
- ◆ Performance expectations are fuzzy or inappropriate or are not consciously chosen. Formal leaders of the team fail to take the “big picture” into account when making decisions, or when gauging priorities and morale of group members. 75% of respondents scored poor, very poor or extremely poor in this.
- ◆ The team is ineffective in experimentation, brainstorming and adaptability, with almost 75% scoring poor, very poor or extremely poor. There is little sense of ‘play’ or fun at appropriate times.
- ◆ Respondents view themselves as having ineffective meetings, where the use of time, people and energy in meetings is considered unproductive. One third of respondents ranked effectiveness of meetings as very low. Two thirds ranked meetings at mid range, with one third ranking meetings as very poor. It was also noted that participation in staff meetings is low, with approximately one third of staff absent regularly from most meetings.
- ◆ Respondents generally view themselves as moderately effective in using outside contacts and resources, with 75% the scoring between very good and very poor.
- ◆ The team is very ineffective at group problem solving and decision-making, with 75% ranking this aspect of teamwork at extremely poor, very poor or poor.

Overall, the responses to this questionnaire indicate that individual staff members at your school accomplish tasks associated with their positions well, but that the team as a whole is functioning very poorly. Because most of the respondents were teachers, this finding may be due largely to the independent and isolated nature of teaching. Whatever stress or difficulties may be occurring with colleagues can be set aside when teachers enter their classroom and focus on the learning needs of students.”

With respect to our analysis of this quadrant (Our Teamwork) we recommended several strategies to increase teamwork, communication, decision-making procedures, role definition and effective meeting design.

“My Behaviour”

Introduction

This quadrant examines the role of inherency in conflict, which is part of an ongoing debate about whether conflict is primarily affected by genetics or by social learning, or their interaction. The Diamond Approach (a form of interactionist theory) does not favour any one particular quadrant, nor any single theory domain. Rather, we propose that when conflict arises, its origins exist within all quadrants at the same time, with each contributing to an integrated whole.

Although this quadrant is rich with contributions from such theorists as Hobbes, Freud, Lorenz, and Marx, our focus is on the work of John Burton and his development of ‘needs theory’. While ‘needs’ may arise from within the individual or group, they will be denied or met within the social and cultural context of the organization. Essential to understanding ‘needs’ theory is the premise that human beings are motivated by a series

of drives, or needs, which compel them to act and that these needs will be pursued by all possible means. Therefore needs satisfaction is expressed in social environments, and so the organizational setting influences the degree to which they may be satisfied (Tidwell, 1998).

Needs Theory

Needs theory grew out of the work of John Burton, an Australian academician and former Permanent Secretary of the Australian Department of External Affairs. Drawing extensively on his international experience, Burton believed that conflicts could be resolved effectively without relying on power based bargaining methods. He noted that governments and institutions often impede progress toward the resolution of conflict because part of their function is to protect existing power relationships and the resulting status quo. Burton (in Tidwell, 1998) believed that the resolution of conflicts grows more directly from the understanding of social human relationships. Hence he rejected the premise that coercion and power are the basis upon which conflicts are best resolved. Building on the reputable work of Maslow (1987) and Sites (1973) Burton laid the foundation for the application of needs theory in the conflict arena.

In this section, we confirm the distinction between disputes and conflicts, and reinforce the relationship that needs theory has with conflict. Because the focus here is on individual needs, we also link individual needs with their corresponding identity group. This is because individuals pursue the satisfaction of their individual needs through their affiliation with their identity group.

Sample interview questions and sample analysis in the “my behaviour” domain

- What is unique or special about your work with young teens?
- Why do you choose to work in this kind of school?
- What is the most important “message” you want to impart to the students?

Sample analysis

To illustrate this quadrant (My Behaviour) we have included an edited excerpt from our report:

“The level of needs satisfaction is often mediated by the organization in which people work. When one group imposes its needs on another, then needs satisfaction may become the cause of the conflict. When we analyze this conflict from a needs theory perspective, we shift the focus from examining how power is exercised, to identifying unfulfilled needs and exploring potential solutions that will address needs satisfaction for all parties.

From this perspective we can see that your school has operated in such a way as to deny the satisfaction of the needs of most staff. Our analysis of data generated by the interviews and school documents indicates that attaining needs such as *consistency of response, recognition, justice, and control* have been frustrated. This has occurred through a lack of awareness rather than intentional design or deliberate actions.

Here are a few illustrative examples:

Consistency of response: Many teachers reported a bias in the ways that administration responds to their concerns. It was reported that if you were in the “in crowd” your concerns were more likely to be satisfactorily met. Additionally,

many reported that limited resources, especially scarce dollars, were disproportionately allocated to supporters of the administration, thus highlighting the suspicion of an 'in group' and an 'out group'. We do not know whether or not there is actual favouritism in such matters, however, even the appearance of such has serious implications in this intensely conflictual atmosphere.

Recognition: As noted above, many teachers believe that favourable *recognition* is tied to a positive relationship with the administration. Additionally, teachers reported (and supported their claims with tangible examples) that recognition was disproportionately directed toward the 'in group'. This was also our observation.

Justice: Justice was of particular concern to teachers who stated that a student centred philosophy in the school has led to problems. For example, when some teachers have been involved in a dispute with a student, then an administrator stepped in to mediate, it appeared to the teacher that the student often ended up receiving favourable treatment. This bias is seen to undermine the teachers' authority in the classroom and is believed by some to be contributing to a school tone that permits, even encourages, disrespectful behaviours on the part of students. Simultaneously, we also received reports of examples in which some teachers used humiliating reprimands and forms of discipline that contravene school district policies and practices. Regardless of one's judgement about the alleged indiscretions, the dissonance among the adults' various responses to student activities that test the protocols of sanctioned behaviours is cause for concern. It is this dissonance that generates perceptions of injustice.

Control: People who do not have the opportunity to participate in decisions that affect their professional interests and who do not have the ability to manage their immediate environment grow anxious and will assert themselves to attain this need. The significant changes at your school during the past four years have been destabilizing for some teachers, and their control needs have been frustrated.”

With respect to our analysis of this quadrant (My Behaviour) we recommended several strategies to increase staff needs attainment.

“My Leadership”

Introduction

This quadrant refers to the cognitive and emotional development of individuals and in this essay is devoted to a discussion of leadership, which is a significant aspect of personal, internal development. Understanding the importance of leadership in healthy organizational development will allow members of the Team to manage and transform the current conflict, thereby facilitating their organization to build an effective learning community. A leader is like a symphony conductor, creating the artistic interpretation of the composer, and accepting complete responsibility for the music that is created. Regardless of the difficulties and challenges they face, leaders must assume ultimate responsibility for the overall performance of their organization.

Leadership is a multi-dimensional phenomenon, and as such deserves to be examined from a perspective that acknowledges many of its dimensions. Too often we think of leadership in purely instrumental terms, which encourages the development of techniques and skills, but rarely reaches beyond. The Diamond Approach that we present

in this essay for examining conflict can also be used to consider leadership. This is appropriate because leadership is so much more than application of learned skills. So, we can reflect on leadership from the perspective of:

- ◆ The interior of groups (*Culture or Spirit*). This includes values, spirituality and the diverse ways in which we answer the heart's longing to be connected with the largeness of life.
- ◆ The exterior of individuals and groups (*Teamwork*). This manifests as the conscious translation of leaders' values into behaviours and actions.
- ◆ The interior of the individual (*Leadership*). This includes the continuing exploration of the intellectual and emotional depths of the leader.

Leadership behaviours and actions in the workplace are derived from the leader's depth of understanding of her colleagues and others, and of her own personal strengths and challenges, maturity and values. Leaders are able to support staff according to the depth and extent of their own self-awareness, especially as this awareness relates to their values and ethics. Because values are operationalized in supervisory practices, it is incumbent upon leaders to be conscious of the values and principles that inform their practice.

This quadrant of analysis also speaks to the importance of leadership roles and functions at all levels within the organization. Good leadership involves building competence in relationships with one another that, in concert, produce desirable results for the organization. Together, all members of the Team and administrative staff continually strive to achieve both personal and organizational potential.

Finally, good practice will only take place if leaders expect it, invite it, and create the environment within which it can occur. Becoming a leader of this sort, one that opens the space rather than occupies it, requires an inner journey of self-discovery beyond fear and into authentic self hood; a journey toward respecting the contrasting “otherness” of all community members, and understanding how connected and resourceful we really are. As these inner qualities deepen, leaders are better able to open the space in which people feel safe and invited to create communities of mutual support (Palmer, 1998).

Sample interview questions and sample analysis in the “My Leadership” domain

- How do you approach conflict in general?
- How have you responded to conflict in your professional life in the past?
- How do you know when you have been successful in responding to conflict?
- What is your hypothesis about this conflict?
- What strategies have you used to manage or resolve this conflict?
- In what ways may your approach have been unhelpful; perhaps exacerbated the conflict?
- In what other ways have you influenced this conflict?
- What are the values that influence your leadership and actions?
- Are there any victims in this conflict? If so, who are they?

Sample analysis

Several different theories were applied to our analysis of the data from this quadrant (My Leadership). We have included an edited excerpt from our report, which focuses on reflective practice:

“Regarding reflective practice: “A folk wisdom phrase captures the irony and the challenge of the current situation. “Insanity occurs when one does the same thing over and over, and expects different results”. This phenomenon is what Ellen Langer refers to as “mindlessness”. She says that at times like this, *we think that we are thinking, when we are not*. Although various strategic approaches have been employed in attempts to ameliorate the situation, both teachers and administrators appear, on some level, to be continuing to do what they have done for the past three years, with little positive effect. Changes have been incremental; many for the worse. Interpersonal conflict has intensified and “battle lines” among staff cliques have calcified. This has led to symptoms of intergroup conflict, which create another level of complexity to the situation.

Langer (1989) relates mindlessness to habit and the unconscious mind. The origins of this state she believes are found in our categorization of the world and the distinctions we make among these categories. It is one of the ways in which we manage our understanding of the world around us. On the other hand, mindfulness is the state of being open to new information and the awareness of more than one perspective. It is the ability to create new categories of experience (De Bono, 1978).

Mindless, routine behaviour is like the pull of gravity. We are “pulled” into solving problems with previously adopted routine strategies, even when our strategies have not been successful in achieving the outcomes that we desire. In responding to the challenges of the conflict at your school, administration and staff will be pulled into the orbit of attempting to solve problems in ways that are familiar from the past. However, we can change this approach at any time. During the present turbulence, all staff members can make a choice to develop new decision making styles and problem-solving methods. Reflective practice is an excellent example of such a method.

In our analysis of the conflict, it is apparent that some staff members manifest the effects of “mindlessness” behaviours and decision-making styles. By adopting reflective practice approaches, your school will encourage organizational and individual learning in ways that inspire creative solutions that, without reflective practice, may not have been possible.”

With respect to our analysis of this quadrant (My Leadership), we recommended several strategies, flowing from different theoretical domains, to increase staff leadership awareness, growth and effectiveness.

Implications

Underpinning this essay is a call for the exploration of the nature and consequences of the assumptions that frame the consultant’s intervention process. These are necessary and crucial explorations because it is through this lens - our assumptions - that practice theory and action is determined and implemented.

We believe that a multi-quadrant approach offers a richer and deeper understanding of conflict in organizations thus increasing the possibilities of a successful intervention.

Further enriching this model, but completely limited by space in this essay, is applying a phenomenological developmental approach to this multi-quadrant model (an all level, all quadrant analysis). Similar to Habermas's notion's of critical theory this would take our understanding of conflict in the organization to include the development of individuals involved in conflict and communication and considers the impact of personal ideals, morals and social influences and creativity as individuals influence conflict interactions (Gleason, 1998). Developmental theorists, which, include among them, Graves, Habermas, Kegan, Kramer, and Maslow, propose that human consciousness and growth of the mind can be understood as a series of unfolding stages or waves (Wilber 2000).

The integration of developmental thinking in an all quadrant approach to the understanding conflict is a challenge to the pluralistic, post-modern approaches that many conflict theorists promote. Simply put, in an organization or in the community, an individuals response to conflict is a reflection of their level of consciousness, which is informed by their culture and as manifested in the artifacts of the social system.

Conclusion

In this essay we have presented an analysis of the origins and deficiencies of uni-dimensional organizational analysis. We have introduced a multi-quadrant model, which, illustrated by a case-study of an organizational conflict, highlights the different perspectives each quadrant reveals, and the types of data that are collected and analyzed

in each quadrant. This approach informs the distinctive restoration actions that are recommended in each quadrant regarding conflict in an organization.

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