

**UNDERSTANDING OF THE USE OF BLAKE &
MOUTON'S MODEL AS A TOOL FOR ANALYSING AND
IMPROVING MANAGEMENT OF CONFLICT IN
ORGANISATIONS**

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Abstract

Conflict by itself is neither good nor bad. Clash or competition between the people with odd needs, thoughts, attitude, principles, or targets can be defined as Conflict. Every management who claim themselves as a high performance team should know how to manage conflict to reduce the worst that never bear a fruitful outcome. Conflict is customary in a team; however, their outputs are not fixed but in all conflicts need not to be properly addressed and resolved. In every social setting, conflict is a common phenomenon that arises between all kinds of people in respect of human relationships. Conflict management process need to be understood by every management to maxim Conflict Management involves implementing strategies to limit the negative aspects of conflict and to increase the positive aspects of conflict at a level equal to or higher than where the conflict is taking place. It is not concerned with eliminating all conflict or avoiding conflict. In today's world we have to depend on others cooperation. Interpersonal conflict itself is not a severe trouble but it can become serious if it is not handled and managed in a proper way. The basic objective of this study is to manage the conflict in organizations by using Blake & Mouton's model. It also has covered causes, nature, theoretical background and conflict resolving styles which pursued with Blake and Mouton Model. Finally, the study outlined

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a conclusion with recommendations and an action plan for future research the author has chosen interpersonal conflict that occurred in personal life. The incidents which described and analyzed in this writings are purely an interactive conflict of two university faculty of the department of Sociology in a public University of Bangladesh.

Introduction

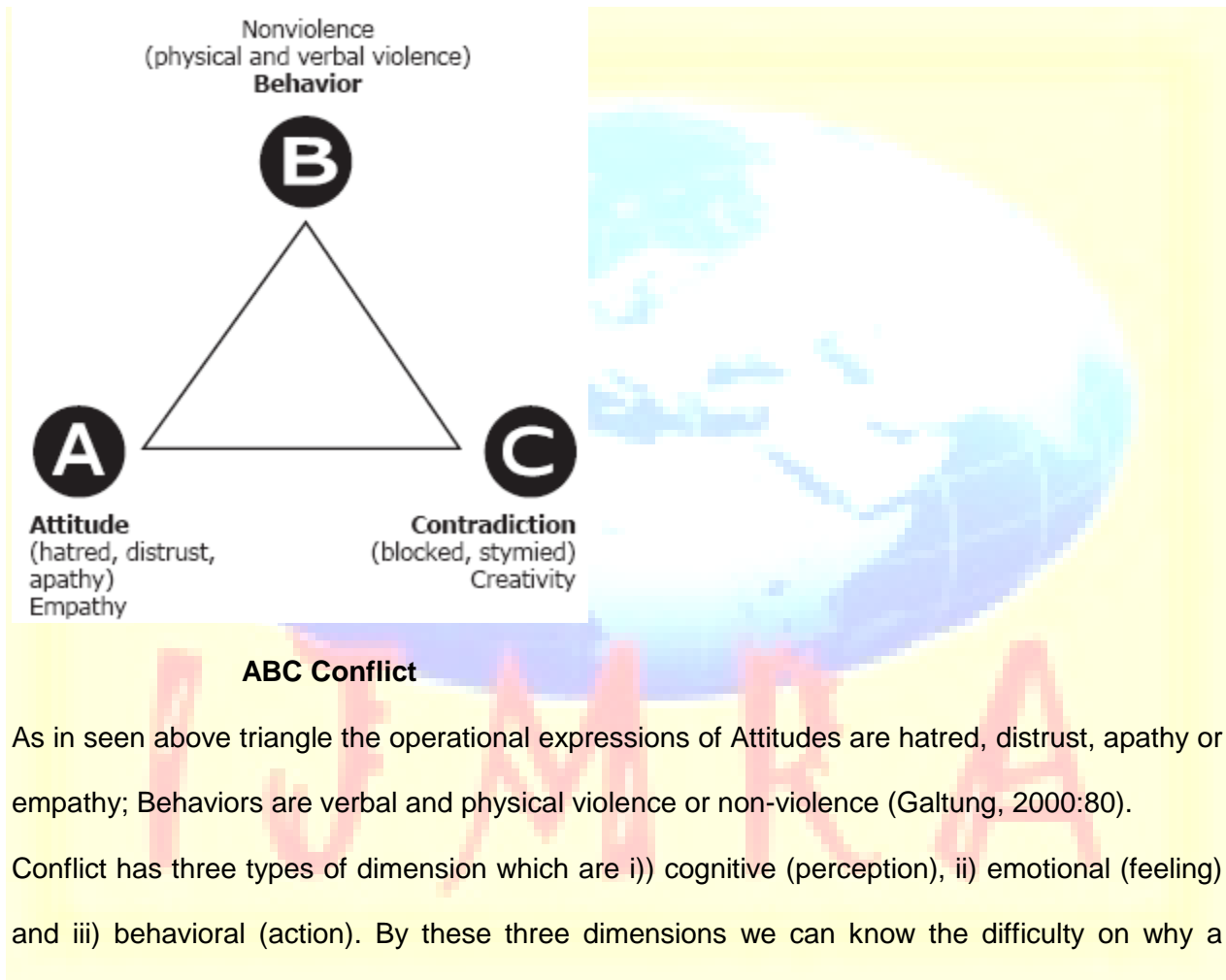
Conflict can be defined as a clash or competition between the people with odd needs, thoughts, attitude, principles, or targets. In a team conflict is usual; however, their outputs are not fixed. It is a motto that all conflicts need not to be properly resolved but each management who claim themselves as a high performance team should know how to manage conflict to reduce the worst that never bear a fruitful outcome. In every social setting, conflict is a common phenomenon that arises between all kinds of people in respect of human relationships. Conflict by itself is neither good nor bad. Conflict management process need to be understood by every management to maximize productive outcomes and minimize destructive ones.

Objectives and Rationale

In today's world we have to depend on others cooperation. Interpersonal conflict itself is not a severe trouble but it can become serious if it is not handled and managed in a proper way. The basic objective of this study is to manage the conflict in organizations by using **Blake & Mouton's model**. It also has covered causes, nature, theoretical background and conflict resolving styles which pursued with Blake and Mouton Model. Finally, the study outlined a conclusion with recommendations and an action plan for future research. I have chosen interpersonal conflict that occurred in my personal life. The incident which I described and analyzed in this writings that are purely an interactive conflict of two university faculty of the department of Sociology in Rajshahi University of Bangladesh where I worked from 2003 to 2007.

Definition of Conflict

Attitudes + Behavior + Contradiction = Conflict (Galtung, 2000:13). In his point of view, contradiction gives rise to attitudes and behaviors apart from of the character (which patterns it follows) of the conflict. These attitudes and behaviors differ depending on the character of the conflict. Nature/pattern of conflict reflects either destroyer or creator.



Conflict Management

Conflict Management involves implementing strategies to limit the negative aspects of conflict and to increase the positive aspects of conflict at a level equal to or higher than where the conflict is taking place. Furthermore, the aim of conflict management is to enhance learning and

group outcomes (effectiveness or performance in organizational setting) (Rahim, 2002:208). It is not concerned with eliminating all conflict or avoiding conflict.

Sources & Causes of Conflict

Conflict has many reasons; the origin of conflicts may be explained by using different theories. Human needs are the center of all conflicts. There are five basic sources of conflict which are as follows:

a) the ways people communicate, b). Emotions c) Values d) the structures of human interactions, and e) History. Therefore, Conflict may occur when:

- A party is required to engage in an activity that is incongruent with his or her needs or interests.
- A party possesses attitudes, values, skills, and goals that are salient in directing his or her behavior but are perceived to be exclusive of the attitudes, values, skills, and goals held by the other(s).
- Two parties have partially exclusive behavioral preferences regarding their joint actions.
- Two parties are interdependent in the performance of functions or activities (Rahim, 2002:213).

Theoretical Background of Conflict Management

It is entirely appropriate to say that there has been “conflict” over the role of conflict in groups and organizations. One school of thought has been different from another one. But these are neither “right” nor “wrong” only different. I prefer to describe Alan Fox’s the following four different frames of reference on conflict:

unitarist frame of reference on conflict: a perspective on conflict which regards management and employee interests as coinciding and which thus regards conflict as harmful and to be avoided.

pluralist frame of reference on conflict: a perspective which views organizations as consisting of different, natural interest groups each with its own potentially constructive, legitimate interest, which make conflict between them inevitable.

interactionist frame of reference on conflict: a perspective on conflict which sees it is a positive and necessary force within organization that is essential for their effective performance. The interactionist frame believes that conflict should be encouraged whenever it emerges, and stimulated if it is absent (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2004; 792).

The interactionist view does not propose that all conflicts are good. Rather some conflict support the goals of the group and improves its performance. These are functional, constructive forms of conflict and dysfunctional or destructive forms of conflict.

Functional conflict: conflict that supports the goals of the group and improves its performance.

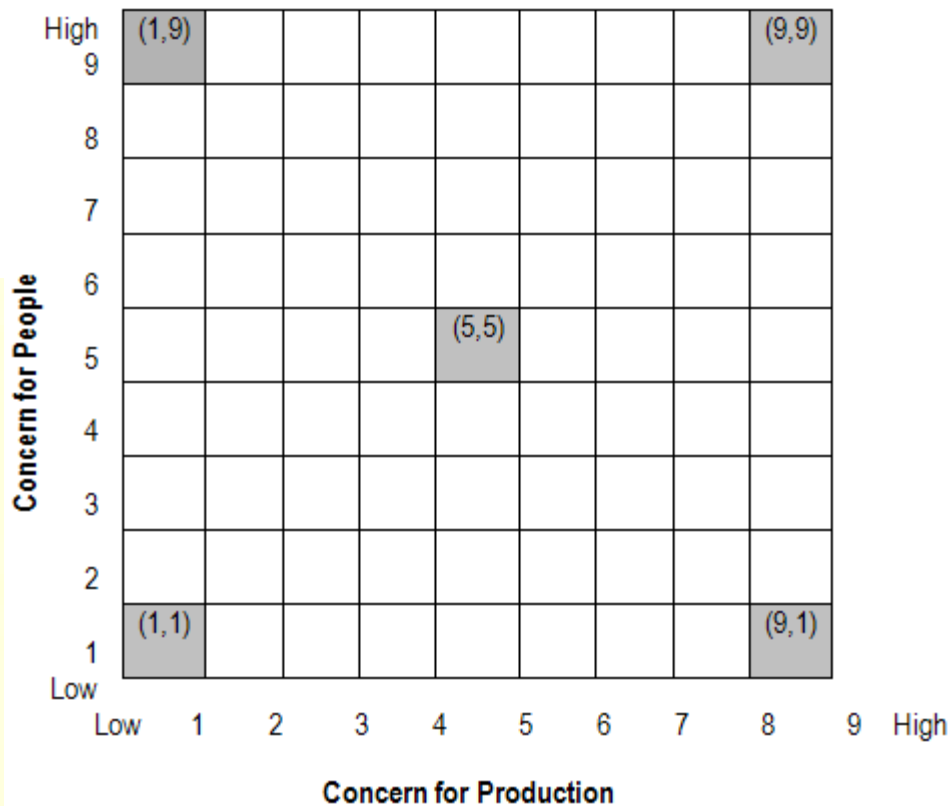
Dysfunctional conflict: conflict that hinders group performance (Robbins, 2001: 384).

Radical: sees conflict as an inevitable outcome of capitalism.

Understanding of Blake and Mouton model

The treatment of task orientation and people orientation as two independent dimensions was a major step in leadership studies. Robert Blake and Jane Mouton (1960s) proposed a graphic portrayal of leadership styles through a managerial grid (sometimes called leadership grid). The grid depicted two dimensions of leader behavior, concern for people (accommodating people's needs and giving them priority) on y-axis and concern for production (keeping tight schedules) on x-axis, with each dimension ranging from low (1) to high (9), thus creating 81 different positions in which the leader's style may fall (Figure- 1).

Figure 1: Managerial Grid



The five resulting leadership styles are as follows:

Impoverished Management (1, 1): Managers with this approach are low on both the dimensions and exercise minimum effort to get the work done from subordinates. The leader has low concern for employee satisfaction and work deadlines and as a result disharmony and disorganization prevail within the organization.

Task management (9, 1): Also called dictatorial or perish style. The leader believes that efficiency can result only through proper organization of work systems and through elimination of people wherever possible. Such a style can definitely increase the output of organization in short run but due to the strict policies and procedures, high labour turnover is inevitable.

Middle-of-the-Road (5, 5): This is basically a compromising style wherein the leader tries to maintain a balance between goals of company and the needs of people. The leader does not push the boundaries of achievement resulting in average performance for organization.

Country Club (1, 9): This is a collegial style characterized by low task and high people orientation where the leader gives thoughtful attention to the needs of people thus providing them with a friendly and comfortable environment. However, a low focus on tasks can hamper production and lead to questionable results.

Team Management (9, 9): Characterized by high people and task focus oriented. The leader feels that empowerment, commitment, trust, and respect are the key elements in creating a team atmosphere which will automatically result in high employee satisfaction and production (<http://www.managementstudyguide.com/blake-mouton-managerial-grid.htm>).

Case or Example of an Interpersonal Conflict

Brief description of the organization

University of Rajshahi is one of the largest Rajshahi Universities in Bangladesh. After its foundation on July 6, 1953, the university has passed 57 years providing higher education and research. At present there are 29, 000 students and 1200 faculty members with 49 departments and 9 institutions in this university. Sociology is one of the reputed departments under Social science faculty which established in 1964 (www.ru.bd.ac).

Problem Statement

The Problem identified in September 2007 when I was worked as a faculty in the department of Sociology in RU. The trouble started with my colleague who was also my class mate in the university life. Our relationship during then was good but very competitive. He joined in the department just after one year than me and as per university rules he became my junior as a faculty. It made him touchy and he didn't maintain normal relationship with me. It is the provision of the university that every year under each faculty there would be some research student those who secured good grade at Bachelor level. For the first time I got one student but my colleague didn't as he was professionally junior. He became very angry and zealous with me that affected negatively my research student as well. He behaved badly with my research student in the class

in different ways. Finally he has given a very poor grade to that student in his course. As a brilliant student, he has achieved good grades in all the courses except one. The student then challenged it by giving a written complain through proper channel. The authority took it strongly to extricate the truth and keep uphold the image of the university as well. As per university rules, the authority formed inquiry committee to solve this complain. To ensure the transparency and accountability the committee decided to re-check his examination paper by another faculty which revealed that my colleague has intentionally given a very poor grade. They have sent show-cause letter to my colleague giving 7 days time for self-defense to prove the matter. They also mentioned in their letter that failure to prove would be the result of punitive punishment against him. He became very cruel and crazy on me as he suspected that I have some involvement in this matter. At this stage, conflict between us was very intensive. He failed to satisfy the inquiry committee and the committee recommended in their report for taking necessary action/ punishment to the higher authority in accordance with university ordinance. The authority of the university examined the report very carefully and agreed that as the offence was very much un-ethical, therefore, punitive action needed to be taken against him. Finally he was dismissed.

Applying the Blake Mouton Managerial Grid

According to Blake and Mouton model this type of leadership style followed by Produce or Perish Leadership – High Production/Low People (9,1) 'Authoritarian' The leader concentrates almost exclusively on achieving results. People are viewed as a commodity to be used to get the job done. Communication is de-emphasized and conflict is resolved by suppressing it. Leadership is controlling, demanding and over-powering. As the authority was very rigid to keep uphold the image of the university, so they didn't compromise with the quality or production. They thought that if they overlooked this type of complain or took lightly, then it would be occurred frequently and brilliant student would not be properly evaluated. As a result, the

outcome of the university such as education, status of teacher and leadership style of authority will be questionable. On the other hand they also thought that the aggrieved may go to the court if he didn't get fair justice from the authority. Then it will be a national issue by getting media coverage and an embarrassing situation might be faced by the authority. So they took very harsh decision for insuring quality and get the matter unquestionable.

Best option

Most effective team leadership style is not always recognizing in every situation. While the paybacks of democratic and participative approach of management are universally accepted, there is scope for giving more concentration in one area than an extra. I felt that the authority could manage the conflict by following Blake and Mouton Middle-of-the-Road Leadership – Medium Production/Medium People (5, 5) approach. This style seems to be a balance of the two competing concerns. It may at first appear to be an ideal compromise. In this specific case the authority followed the produce or Perish Leadership – High Production/Low People (9, 1) 'style for conflict resolution. It means they are highly production oriented rather than less people oriented. But a leader must have to think about the people first. If we don't give emphasis to the people, it is not possible to get high production. That is why it was better if the authority could follow the middle of the road leadership-medium production/medium people (5, 5) where the leader can look his production and his people as well. In my argument, I would like to mention that authority could solve the conflict by giving him two years temporary suspension. According to **Blake and Mouton** 5, 5 style the authority could be able to manage both side of managerial grid. So that in people side of the grid that faculty might be personally and socially embarrassed but at least could survive and in production side by giving this sort of punishment, the quality of education, image of the university and nature of justice would be insured. I also think that the authority could consider his offence liberally (such as held up promotion, stop increment, can

not be an examiner for a certain period, watchful observation in his duties, etc) as because he was quite new and he did this type of offense for the first time in his teaching life.

Suggestions for Improvement

1. The authority of the University should follow Middle-of-the-Road Leadership – Medium Production/Medium People (5, 5) approach rather than Produce or Perish Leadership – High Production/Low People (9, 1).
2. Should be given two years temporary suspension from the job.
3. Needed to organize training/induction for newly appointed faculty.
4. Authority should take some steps to improve the communication between teacher and student and minimize the gap between higher authority and the faculty as well.
5. Should be given more time for self defense.
6. More evidence and information should be reviewed.
7. Should be formed another tribunal nominated by the Syndicate.
8. Authority should disseminate proper information and knowledge pack about the rules and regulations of the university to all faculties.

Action Plan

Recommendations	Actions to be taken	Responsible Person
Recommendation-1: The authority of the University should follow Middle-of-the-Road Leadership – Medium Production/Medium People (5, 5) approach rather than Produce or Perish Leadership – High Production/Low People (9, 1).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> temporary suspension gathering more information formed another high power tribunal give him opportunity to involve a law year organized face to face interview with that two faculty and the student 	Authority and the Inquiry Committee
Recommendation-2: Should be given two years temporary suspension form the job.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> stopped all financial benefits held up promotion rejected from all examination committee permanently 	Authority and Department
Recommendation-3: Needed to organize training/induction for newly appointed faculty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> arrange workshop/seminar induction with senior faculty create awareness about ordinance and rules of conduct through round table discussion 	Authority and Faculty members
Recommendation-4: Authority should take some steps to improve the communication between teacher and student and minimize the gap between higher authority and the faculty as well.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> organize cultural club, debating society, arrange study tour and picnic, combined annual dinner, arrange inter department and intra department charity games and sports increase recreational facilities for faculty members, develop a system for giving award for better performance and censure for worst performance of the faculty members 	Authority, Faculty members, Physical Instructor and different cultural groups of the university

Conclusion

Organizational conflict must not certainly be reduced, censored, or removed, but handled to improve organizational learning and effectiveness. In the process of managing conflict decisions that are made must be ethical which can convince the needs and hopes of the relevant stakeholders. Last but not least, information which have been gathered and generated in this study will be helpful to develop the management of conflict in existing organizations/institutions.

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