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ABSTRACT

            This paper reports research which utilizes a
qualitative approach in order to document and describe the process of
complex organizational conflict. Qualitative research methodology and
conflict sociology can be relevant to analysis of organizational
processes. The qualitative approach is interpreted to include
techniques such as observation, event analysis, and process
documentation. Conflict sociology, based upon "Class and Class
Conflict in Industrial Society," by Ralf Dahrendorf, suggests that a
theoretical model should direct research and pose questions which
will make sense out of a social phenomenon. Other sociologists who
have contributed to development of the conflict model include Thomas
Eliot, Gerhard Lenski, Robert North, Wilmer Cody, Frank W. Lutz,
Randall Collins, and Robert Brumbaugh. An example of analytical
contributions of a qualitative research design is a study conducted
in 1974-75 to assess mandated change in teacher education and
certification in New York state. Data were collected regarding
attitudes and activities of participants in the teacher training
program. An explanatory theory, based upon research by Dahrendorf and
Collins, was constructed to explain program development. Findings
indicated that mandated change has a high potential for generating
conflict, selective involvement and non-participation of
participants, and redistribution of power. The conclusion is that a
theory based on conflict sociology and qualitative methods served to
clearly explain participant behavior and organizational processes in
the case of teacher preparation in New York state. (Author/DB)

CONFLICT SOCIOLOGY - A PERSPECTIVE FOR
ORGANIZATONAL THEORY

by

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"Conflict Sociology - A Perspective
for Organizational Theory"

This paper will focus on two subject areas which are funda-
mental to the development and utilization of relevant organization-
al theory. These two broad subject areas are qualitative research
methodology and Conflict Sociology as a productive model for the
analysis of complex organizational processes. In order to address
these two subject areas each will be addressed individually. Sub-
sequently both subject areas will be dealt with more specifically as
utilized in recent research involving the analysis of inter and intra
organizational conflict. Through the utilization of this framework
the two methodological and theoetical areas can be explained and then
"grounded" in actual work which utilized both approaches.

This paper will also, most importantly, address the issue of how
both approaches can be used most effectively through an inductive
ethnographic research process rather than the more commonly utilized
hypothetico-deductive research process. It is a basic assumption of
the authors that the inductive ethnographic approach, combined with
qualitative methodologies and the theoretical perspective of Conflict
Sociology provides a comprehensive model for the analysis of complex
organizational phenomena.

The Qualitative Approach

The countless arquments, endless debates, and the professional
biases relative to qualitative vs. quantitative approaches are suf-

ficient to turn an aspiring social scientist into an educator (of

all things). One has only to venture into any graduate school and

examine the course offerings to see the dichotomy which many scien-

tists wish to perpetuate relative to the two techniques. In fact, a

hierarchy is even erected relative to the two approaches in many

schools of education. The statistical, deductive, tight, behavioral

designs appear to be granted much status in the educational research

community. In fact they are accorded so much status that they become

the "measuring stick" for successful research.

Apparently, the very productive and useful work of many sociologist,

anthropologists, psychologists, and organizational theorists who utilized

ethnographic techniques such as observation, event analysis, and process

documentation are not considered "tight enough". Obviously, such is not

the case and the educational community is becoming more aware of the value

of qualitative approaches. Therefore, this paper reports research which

utilizes a qualitative approach in order to document and describe the

process of complex organizational conflict.

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The Conflict Perspective: A Model for
Sociological Analysis
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In 1957, Ralf Dahrendorf published a book entitled Class and

Class Conflict in Industrial Society. Dahrendorf proposed a model for

the conceptualization of society as an alternative to the predominant

model of structural-functionalism. According to Dahrendorf the

structural-functional model of society was "Utopian" in nature and as

such failed to provide an adequate model for the conceptualization of

sociological problems, theory, and research. His objections to struc-

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</div>

ral-functional theorists were too numerous to detail here. However,
some of Dahrendorf's criticisms are worth mentioning as they can aid
in gaining a clearer picture of his model.

In "Out of Utopia—Toward A Reorientation of Sociological Analysis"
(1958), Dahrendof delineates his major objections to structural- function-
al theorists. Among these objections is his contention that structural-
functional theorists are Utopian and as such cannot, and do not, perceive
society in a way which will generate appropriate sociological research.
Another of his objections is that Utopians seek to make a false distinc-
tion between theory and research. To Dahrendorf the two are inseparable.

> Above all this conception implies that sociological research
> and sociological theory are two separate activities which
> it is possible to divide and join. I do not believe that
> is so. (p. 115)

Dahrendorf continues by stating that if the position that theory and
research is separable is accepted, we will have little success at examining
problems. What Dahrendorf means here is that we should be interested in the
explanation of problems. He says "at the beginning of every scientific
investigation there should be a puzzle" (p. 117).

Dahrendorf also indicates that the "equilibrium" model is frequently
employed. Regarding the equilibrium model Dahrendorf states:

> It may be my personal bias, but I can think of many more problems
> to which the social system does not apply than those to which it
> does. (p. 120)

Dahrendorf's rather strong statement and objections to the structural-
functionalist approach have been summarized by William Chamblis (1973).

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Chamblis delineates the assumptions of the structural-functionalist approach as follows:

1. Every society is a relatively persisting configuration of elements.

2. Every society is a well-integrated configuration of elements.

3. Every element in a society contributes to its functioning.

4. Every society rests on the consensus of its members. (1973, p. 20)

In addition to the objections cited above it is these fundamental assumptions of the structural-functional model which Dahrendorf strongly denounces. In their place Dahrendorf offers four antithetical assumptions:

1. Every society experiences at every moment social conflicts, social conflict is ubiquitous.

2. Every society is subjected at every moment to social change, social change is ubiquitous.

3. Every element in a society contributes to its change.

4. Every society rests on the constraint of it's members.

These fundamental assumptions form the basis for the conflict perspective. The conflict perspective forms a model or paradigm for our understanding of a phenomenon. However, a model is not a theory. It is a point of view. As such it cannot be proven wrong. A model directs our research in a general way and suggests questions to be asked which will make some sense out of a social phenomenon. It is in this manner that the conflict perspective should be used.

From this broad point of reference which forms the conflict model, other researchers and theorists have discussed conflict. In "The Nature of Society" Gerhard Lenski (1973) proposes that conflict is an important element in every society. He states that many of the "systems theorists" tend to ignore or

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play down the element of conflict in order to seek equilibrium models.

Lenski points out that throughout history all societies have

been involved in conflict as it is impossible for the individuals

and groups within a society to agree on every issue which con-

fronts them (p. 39).

Robert North (1969) discusses conflict in a study on violence.

He state that conflict

> emerges whenever two or more persons seek to possess the
> same object, occupy the same (physical or status) space,
> play the same role, maintain incompatible goals or under-
> take mutually incompatible means for achieving their purposes,
> and so forth. (p. 3)

As Dahrendorf implies, it is difficult to envision society

as not involved in one of these types of conflict perpetually.

This is true on the individual, group and national level.

The amount of iterature in education regarding conflict in

schools is extremely sparse. Most discussions of conflict pertain

to collective bargaining. There are, however, some statements

regarding conflict in education which can prove of interest to us.

Wilmer S. Cody (1974) discusses conflict in terms of governance,

accountability, and evaluation in education. He states that conflict

is a critical element in the processes involved in school adminis-

tration. Thomas Eliot (1959) says that school governance is founded

in two apparent conflicts in American Education. These conflicts are

the struggle between the public's fight to educational self-determination,

and the professional's need for wide range of decision perogatives.

These two contentions that conflict exist in the schools, and may

even be inherent, lend support to the use of the conflict perspective.

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Another concept used in the analysis of conflict was proposed
by Frank W. Lutz (1969). Lutz uses the concept of territoriality
and defines it as "cognitive space." He utilizes this term to
analyze teacher-administrator relationships, implying that conflict
between the two groups is often a function of violations by one
group of the other's "cognitive space" (p. 82). Robert Brumbaugh
(1970) argues that the concept of territoriality, as defined by
Lutz, is a critical concept in understanding organizational
functioning and interactions (p. 98).

The description and discussion of the conflict perspective is
presented here as a means of conceptualizing the problems relative
to complex organizational theory. As stated earlier, the literature
presented defines a broad model from which the researcher can conduct
his inquiry. It is not intended as a basis for generating specific
hypotheses or research questions as little is known of most phenomenon
under study.

The methodological qualitative approaches, combined with the
conflict model can combine as a formidable approach to the development
of useful and relevant theory. Such theory is grounded in the event
and is utilized to explain the event. Using this approach the theory
is utilized as a broad perspective and then is tested against the
specific processes described. Theory can then be used to explain
what has occurred which is the primary function of theory. Following
is a description of a study which utilized qualitative methods and
Conflict Sociology.

An Analysis of Inter and Intra
Organizational Conflict

This research focused on mandated change and its impact upon

an institution of higher education (IHE). The mandated change

which this study analyzed was the Competency Based Teacher Ed-

ucation (CBTE) mandate which the New York State Education De-

partment Division of Teacher Education and Certification (SED)

attempted to implement in 1974-75. The study used an ethnographic,

qualitative research design to describe the event studied. The

"Conflict Perspective" as delineate by Dahrendorf (1957) and

Collins (1975) formed the theoretical framework for the analysis

of the event..

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

What are the characteristics of the development of a CBTE program

in an institution of higher education in New York State as it

responded to a state-wide mandate for the development of CBTE

prgrams?

The movement toward CBTE in New York State became an actuality

when the SED, Division of Teacher Education and Certification

established a deadline for program proposal submission. Sixty

IHE's, which represented a total of 146 teacher education programs,

were required to submit CBTE program proposals on or before.

February 1, 1975. Due to the wide variety of institutional settings

and characteristics represented by this group of IHEs responses to

the state mandate took varying forms. However, despite the wide

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diversity of institutional settings and characteristics, SED was cofronted with the problem of developing and applying standardized state-wide criteria upon which to base its decisions regarding program registration.

It is from these two phenomena: (1) the variations in institutional settings and characteristics, and (2) the SED's state-wide mandate and criteria for program development and registration; that the problem which this study addresses arose. This study, conducted an extensive analysis of the development of a CBTE program in an IHE which did not receive program registration.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the study was to: (1) identify and describe characteristics involved in the development of CBTE program, and (2) analyze these identified and described characteristics from the perspective of intra- and inter-organizational conflict, in an institution of higher education as it responded to the state-wide mandate for CBTE program development.

FOCUS

This study focused upon one IHE as it attempted to develop its CBTE program. This IHE was chosen because:

(1) It represents a non-typical case as it is one of the few institutions which did not receive program registration (only four of the sixty did not receive registration).

(2) This IHE was apparently unique in the type and amount of conflict it generated in its attempt to develop a CBTE program.

(3) This IHE has a program for the preparation of elementary education teachers which is the largest teacher education program involved in the February 1975 deadline.

(4) The remaining institutions were currently under study
through a state-wide survey of institutional development
of CBTE programs.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this study was based on several assumptions:.

1. The phenomenon investigated is unique in its configuration.
By this we mean the state-wide mandate for CBTE is unique
in its scope and effect.

2. The institutional response to the sate-wide mandate is
unique as this is a new form of external impetus for
change.

3. A descriptive account of the processes involved in the
IHE and its consortia must be provided in order to interpret
the actions of the individuals and groups involved.

A conceptual framework and methodology for the analysis of social

settings which met the criteria stated above has been proposed by

John Lofland (1971). Lofland's conceptual framework was utilized

here as the methodology necessary for the conduct of this study.

Lofland was chosen for two reasons: (1) his methodology has been

developed to describe the characteristics of a social phenomenon,

and (2) his methodology affords the flexibility to analyze a social

setting, while also providing specificity in the collection and

analysis of data.

Lofland states that a social event can be divided, along a continuum,

into six units of analysis. These units of analysis are:

1. Acts
2. Activities
3. Meanings
4. Participants
5. Relationships
6. Setting

These units of analysis move from microscopic (acts) to macroscopic (setting). By obtaining data within these categories the entire social event can be described. Lofland defines these units of analysis as follows:

1. **Acts**: Action in a situation that is temporarily brief, constituting only a few seconds, minutes or hours.

2. **Activities**: Action in a setting of more major duration --days, weeks, months--constituting significant elements of person's involvements.

3. **Meanings**: The verbal productions of participants that define and direct action.

4. **Participation**: Person's holistic involvement, or adaption to, a situation or setting under study.

5. **Relationships**: Interrelationships among several persons, considered simultaneously.

6. **Setting**: The entire setting under study considered as the unit of analysis.

DESCRIPTIVE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions were utilized in order to obtain data needed to describe the IHE response to the state mandate. They are based on Lofland's framework for the analysis of a social setting.

1. What were the acts of participants during the development of the CBTE program?

2. What were the actions taken by groups during the development of the CBTE program?

3. What were the meanings attributed to acts and actions of participants by themselves and others?

4. In what way did participants become involved or not involved in the development of the CBTE program?

5. What were the relationships of individuals and groups as they were involved in the development of the CBTE program?

6. What was the setting in which the development of the
CBTE program took place (historical, institutional, social,
and political environment)?

ANALYSIS

The basic theoretical perspective for the analysis of the CBTE

program development is conflict theory. The primary source of

theoretical information was Conflict Sociology Toward An

Explanatory Science by Randall Collins (1975).

The purpose of this study is consistent with Collins' assertions.

The attempt was made to utilize some of Collins' explanatory

theory dealing with organizations to explain the complex phenomena

documented and described. Thus an attempt was made to apply and

generate explanations of a complex phenomena based upon experience

There are three distinct characteristics of the process described

by the data. They are:

1. Conflict and Coercion. The utilization and dynamics of
power.

2. Differing goals and approaches to the solution of
problems causing conflict.

3. Conflict within organizations affecting the ability to
function in the collaborative effort.

Each characteristic, and the phenomena it is characteristics of, was
explained in terms of available theory and the generation of theory
where appropriate.

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions of the study are:

1. Mandated change has a high potential for generating conflict.

2. Where change is mandated, attempts at collaborative effort are
impaired.

3. Mandated p..gram development involves the processes of change and conflict.

4. Organizational collaborative efforts involve the distribution and utilization of power.

5. Mandated change can result in attempts to avoid participation.

6. Madated change results in counter-aggression where resources are available.

7. Mandated change can result in non-participation of parties in the collaborative effort when resources for fighting back are not available.

8. Mandated change can result in the "selective involvement" of participants.

9. Mandated change can result in passive resistance and dulled compliance when opportunities to escape and resources for fighting back are not available.

10. Conflict sociology forms a useful theoretical framework for the explanation of mandated CBTE and organizational conflict.

11. Groups with varying goals and approaches to the resolution of problems exhibit a high potential for conflict when coerced into collaboration.

12. Conflict within organizations' ability to effectively relate to other organizations when coersed into collaboration.

This listing show two categories of conclusions which resulted from the study. The first nine conclusions all reflect results observed due to the mandated change. The second category of conclusions deal specifically with the theoretical framework utilized to explain the event.

The first category (those conclusions dealing with the mandate) primarily result from the descriptive data. These data clearly substantiate the contention that the mandated change generated substantial conflict and was characterized by the use of coercion on the part of many groups.

Clearly the coercive characteristic of the entire process of program development led to inefficient utilization of resources and expertise. The collaborative approach to teacher education was greatly hindered by the SED decision to establish CBTE as the only acceptable teaching format for the preparation of teachers in New York State.

What is also quite clear from the data is that CBTE actually became a struggle over control of the process of training teachers. This event was a study in conflict, coercion, and power not a study of collaboration and consensus. The entire educational system became engulfed in struggle for control.

Conflict Sociology is a useful means of analysis for inter and intra organizational relationships. Clearly, Conflict Sociology served to explain the described event and the behavior of its participants. Also this application of Conflict Sociology proved beneficial inexplaining relationships between organizations as well as within them. Every significant act and activity engaged in by the participants in this study was accurately explained by Conflict Sociology.

A final conclusion of this study is that theory which is useful can be generated from descriptive data collected through the use of a process documentation approach. This generation of theory, grounded in data, indicates the need and utility of an inductive, qualitative approach to the study of organizations and social phenomena.

Summary

The utilization of qualitative methods to describe the characteristics of an event, combined with the inductive explanation of the event though the generation of new theory on the utilization of existing theory is a very valuable approach for organizational analysis. All organizational theorists and educators could benefit from the relevant application of qualitative methodologies to analyze complex organizational events.

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